The context of enterprise education: insights into current practices

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Abstract: This paper presents the results of an investigation into contextual differences in the development and delivery of enterprise education in higher education globally. Using information gathered from an online survey distributed to enterprise educators, distinct differences in the provision of enterprise education are identified, as are differences of opinion among enterprise educators. The findings demonstrate that although enterprise education is highly diversified in terms of presentation, content and style, there are clear commonalities with regard to expected student outcomes. The respondents reported low levels of business start-up activity among students during enterprise education and/or within one year of graduation. Over 75% of the educators surveyed had personal start-up experience, and there was limited reliance on academic literature, with a preference for referencing broader stakeholder perspectives. With regard to the practical implications of this research, the international metric of enterprise education appears to be a broad set of enterprising skills that equip and enable students to recognize and exploit opportunities in order to navigate future unknowns. The commonly employed metric of business start-up appears less valid in light of this investigation.

Keywords: enterprise education; student entrepreneurship; entrepreneurship educators; education outcomes; education metrics

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Enterprise and entrepreneurship education (E&E education) has emerged as an important driver of sustained social development and economic recovery and growth in developed and developing countries (Gorman, et al., 1997; Kuratko, 2005; Matlay, 2005a; Botham and Mason, 2007, World Economic Forum, 2009). Over the last two decades entrepreneurship has developed as ‘arguably the most potent economic force the world has ever experienced’ (Kuratko, 2005, p 577). Political involvement has increased and it is now afforded high priority in public policy throughout the world (Gorman, et al., 1997; Luthje and Franke, 2003; Katz, 2003; Mitra and Matlay, 2004; BIS, 2011; UNCTAD, 2011).
Klaus Schwab, the Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum (2009, p 6) suggests that ‘entrepreneurship is the engine fuelling innovation, employment generation and economic growth’ and refers to ‘the power that education has in developing the skills that generate an entrepreneurial mindset and in preparing future leaders for solving more complex, interlinked and fast-changing problems’.

E&E education has emerged in different educational contexts, primarily as a route to develop an entrepreneurial culture, to promote enterprise, to create new ventures and to foster entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning (Kuratko, 2005; EU, 2005). Encouragement for enterprise education worldwide has led to varied development strategies in different countries (Dana, 2001; Fayolle, 2005; Jones and English, 2004; McKeown et al, 2006). Notably, USA business schools have dominated the development of programmes (Bell et al, 2004), with over 20,500 taught at over 1,600 schools (Kuratko, 2005, p 583). In Europe, five million of the 21 million higher education students were engaged in enterprise education in 2008, an engagement rate of 24% (NIRAS, 2009).

Observations that the entrepreneurship and enterprise education community has still to attain academic legitimacy as well as critical mass (Kuratko, 2005) are supported by an acknowledged paucity of empirically rigorous research into the learning strategies employed in programmes, and their subsequent influence (Martinez et al, 2010; Matlay, 2011; OECD, 2009).

A challenge for measuring ‘success’ is that the programme offerings are extremely diverse, including undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and modules, core and optional, sector-specific or generic deliveries – with some programmes placing a particular emphasis on areas such as social entrepreneurship (Hoogendoorn and Pennings, 2010). There is also the overarching consideration of Jamieson’s 1984 typology of teaching ‘about’, teaching ‘for’ and ‘in’ enterprises (see Henry et al, 2003) as the associated teaching, learning and assessment strategies need to align with different goals and outcomes.

An indicator of the extent and longevity of these challenges, and how they may manifest themselves, can be found in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor special report on Education and Training, (Martinez et al, 2010), which notes the call made in 1994 by Garavan and O’Cinneide for a greater understanding ‘about how the programs and learning strategies help develop skills that lead to the formation of new ventures’ (Martinez et al, 2010, p 15). This call has yet to be addressed. Working on the hypothesis that government priorities are business start-ups, ‘It is important that HEIs should aim to capture accurate information on this (student and graduate business starts) as it provides a valuable indicator of the level of their entrepreneurial output’ (Rae et al, 2010, p 12), an initial response could simply provide data for this single metric of entrepreneurship education and assume a remit to stimulate business start-up either during or within one or two years of study. However, such metrics are rarely advocated by the education community because business start-up numbers do not take into account issues of sustainability and longevity. Whilst there may be exceptions, in the main it is not the primary goal. The more recent inclusion of the term ‘enterprise’, as opposed to simply ‘entrepreneurship’, is an indicator of emerging definitions that imply greater breadth. For example, the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship provides the UK context for enterprise as:

‘Learning to use the skills, knowledge and personal attributes needed to apply creative ideas and innovations to practical situations. These include initiative, independence, creativity, problem solving, identifying and working on opportunities.’ (Rae et al, 2010, p 3)

Writing for the World Economic Forum, Wilson provides a succinct aspiration:

‘Now more than ever we need innovation, new solutions, creative approaches and new ways of operating. We are in unchartered territory and need people in all sectors and at all ages who can “think out of the box” to identify and pursue opportunities in new and paradigm thinking ways.’ (World Economic Forum, 2009, p 12)

Without full consideration of conceptual and contextual issues, it can be argued that research into entrepreneurship education lacks clear direction in terms of relevance and stakeholder significance. Moreover, the authors think that in order to ascertain applicability and relevance these factors cannot be ignored and any alternative methodology may be inherently flawed (Matlay, 2005b). Seelig’s (2005) international research supports the premise that a key issue is ‘context, context, context’, making arguments that economic, political, historical and cultural issues should be factored into any debate. This is the premise on which our research was conducted; and while this paper can hope only to introduce our initial findings, its intention is to set the scene for further consideration and debate.

**Contextualizing historical factors**

Vesper and Gartner (1997) suggest that the first entrepreneurship course was offered in 1945, by
Harvard Business School in response to the needs of students returning from military service in the Second World War. Interestingly, they observe that, whilst the course grew in popularity, ‘the faculty member who began it apparently saw insufficient academic future in it and shifted his attention to the study of boards of directors in major companies’ (Vesper and Gartner, 1997, p 406).

Katz (2003) developed the most detailed chronology of entrepreneurship education, including economic and agricultural literature dating back to 1886. Some authors think that the first entrepreneurship courses were held in Japan in the 1930s (Solomon et al, 2002), whilst others suggest they started at Harvard in 1947. However, Kuratko (2005) notes that entrepreneurship only really became a force in business schools in the early 1970s. Since then there has been a proliferation of journals and literature reviews on the subject conducted within and beyond the USA. Dainow (1986, p 10) used published articles to identify ‘the strengths and weaknesses of provision that can guide future efforts’. Among his conclusions was ‘a need for more systematic collection and analysis of data and more varied methodologies to build a stronger empirical base’ (Dainow, 1986, p 18). Gorman et al’s (1997) subsequent ten-year literature review demonstrated a marked increase in empirical research activity in the area of educational process and structure, observing that:

‘Results indicate considerable consensus that entrepreneurship can be taught and that teaching methods can be enhanced through active participation. In addition, there is a clear indication of considerable growth in entrepreneurship courses and programs, although there is very little consistency in approach.’ (Gorman et al, 1997, p 68; see also Vesper and Gartner, 1997; Aldrich and Martinez, 2001; Charney and Libecap, 2003; Peterman and Kennedy, 2003)

This evolutionary path led to acknowledgement that E&E education worked, but that it was an inconsistent landscape that was not fully understood. At this juncture, the picture became more, not less, complicated, as Katz (2003, p 295) observed:

‘While entrepreneurship education in American business schools may be reaching maturity, demand in other markets is growing.’

Katz raises concerns that business schools are not likely to know about and learn from programmes being developed within agriculture, engineering, the learned professions, and arts and science, because these programmes evolve with minimal, if any, involvement by the business school entrepreneurship faculty. He also observed the risk to business schools of a new paradigm of entrepreneurship education supplanting the American business school model. Kuratko (2005, p 587) disputed this notion of maturity, observing that ‘the skirmishes and small battles are being won in business schools’ and that the ‘real war continues to wage for complete respectability and leadership’. However, there is extensive discourse challenging this call for business schools to take the leadership position, questioning why, given its dominance in the development of curricula and research, it has yet to be obtained.

Solomon and Fernald (1991) suggested that the expansion of entrepreneurship education was fuelled by students’ and accreditation bodies’ dissatisfaction with general business education. The very relevance of business schools is also coming under threat from many quarters (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). Gibb (2005, p 2) observes that the traditional business model is ‘largely, but not wholly inappropriate for a number of reasons’ and advocates a model for ‘creating understanding of, and empathy with, the “way of life” of the entrepreneur and how to live day to day with uncertainty and complexity’. According to Rae (2009, p 138), the business school curriculum based on the modern model of the industrial corporation with mass production and consumption is a ‘smoking ruin’. Kirby (2004, p 510) asks, ‘Entrepreneurship education: can business schools meet the challenge?’ He argues that the traditional education system ‘stultifies rather than develops the requisite attributes and skills to produce entrepreneurs’.

Kirby (2004, 2006) is among a growing number of senior E&E educators who advocate a change in the curriculum to develop right-brain entrepreneurial capabilities in addition to the left-brain analytical skills – to encourage and stimulate the entrepreneurial imagination: see for example Chia, (1996), Niewenhuizen and Groenwald (2004), Gibb, (2002, 2005) and Penaluna and Penaluna (2008). Importantly, support for design thinking and its capacity for right brain entrepreneurial skill development is gaining significant momentum (Pink, 2008, Martin, 2009), and is supported by enhanced understanding of neural functions (Kounios et al, 2006; Penaluna and Penaluna, 2009; Penaluna et al, 2010).

Kirby (2006) also identifies significant barriers to developing entrepreneurship in universities, mainly arising because of the size and layers of control in university management systems. Of note is that whilst an entrepreneurial university may be seen as inspirational and advocated by scholars, the context is paramount. For example, Levine (2009) considered the
entrepreneurial university in terms of its entrepreneurial activities for research, expenditure, patents and licensing. He compared the relationship between research universities and local economies in 55 major regions in the USA, yet found no meaningful correlation between any gauges of activity. Gibb (2005) suggested that the entrepreneurial university was more appropriately evaluated on its approach to E&E education, and proposed guidelines for designing an entrepreneurial organization. In 2008 a team of five E&E educators challenged the Institute of Small Business and Entrepreneurship’s International Conference in its education plenary by highlighting the disconnection that they were experiencing between the research agenda and their day-to-day engagements with students and other stakeholders. They used the term ‘pracademic’ to describe the consensus that they had developed through practical experience (Penaluna et al, 2008).

Recently, the United Nations Conference for Trade and Industry (UNCTAD), through its Multi Year Expert Group Meetings, has been considering guidance that will integrate the latest educational thinking into an international policy toolkit. UNCTAD refers to ‘integrating the acquisition of entrepreneurial competencies and “soft skills” such as creativity, initiative and persuasion in the curriculum across all ages and subjects . . . [this implies] a shift from a traditional emphasis in many education systems on evaluating the ideas of others to generating ideas oneself” (UNCTAD, 2011, p 7). Approaches such as these demand a greater understanding of both micro- and macro-contexts.

Research methodology and background

Initially, an extended literature review considered policy and scholarly publications from the USA, Australia and Europe. However, we are mindful of the limitations associated with the traditional literature review, since conceptualizing and contextualizing entrepreneurship education is confounded by many intervening variables (McMullan and Gillin, 2001). The ‘diversity and heterogeneity of the sector is matched by the growing rhetoric that complements the tremendous growth in entrepreneurship education offerings’ (Matlay, 2005a, p 631). There is arguably a publications glut – too many journals (44) – and the continued impetus for those engaged in leading-edge entrepreneurship to publish in the ‘mainstream management journals’ (Katz, 2003).

Our review notes the dominance of literature informed and perpetuated by the business school perspective, which has generally explored only those programmes specifically named ‘enterprise’ and ‘entrepreneurship’. Empirical evidence from the three present authors suggests the need to capture a wider perspective, because not all programmes and modules that develop entrepreneurial capacity and enterprise in their learners include the words entrepreneurship or enterprise in their titles. Many instances of good transferrable practice, especially those already deeply embedded, may be being overlooked. By way of example, in the creative industries there is an acknowledged experience of supporting right-brain development. Contextualizing the industry-based learning requires the reviewer to know that it is normally undertaken in modules with titles such as ‘Professional Studies’ or ‘Marketing and Self Promotion’ and extended into all learning that follows. Case studies by Kellet (2006) and subsequent research by the Higher Education Academy’s Art, Design and Media subject centre in the UK confirmed this perspective (HEA–ADM/NESTA, 2007). Hence surveys that are conducted with universities to capture entrepreneurship education but which confine their questions to enterprise and entrepreneurship provision may find their quantitative results significantly below those of the true picture. Moreover, the respondent may not have the broader perspective that enables them to include these wider offerings either. An example is the 2010 UK-based National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship’s university survey, which acknowledged this shortfall at its presentations at ISBE 2010 (Rae et al, 2010).

The extensive transdisciplinary networks of the present authors offered opportunities to develop this investigation, and to obtain rich empirical evidence. These opportunities and associated understandings led and subsequently informed the methodological approaches in a survey which was designed to capture qualitative and quantitative data from international educators who were primarily concerned with delivery. The intention was to develop the investigation for further publication and to work with selected respondents who had raised questions or offered particularly useful insights. Following an initial review of the survey by critical friends from the E&E community in January 2011, the invitations to participate were sent to the authors’ networks, both personal (LinkedIn and Facebook) and conference networks such as the Institute of Small Business and Entrepreneurship, Enterprise Educators UK and the online Entrepreneurship and Education Network. It was hosted on SurveyMonkey™ as an expression of interest to help to develop a new publication, and was designed to take approximately ten minutes to complete.¹

The design of the questions was derived from the collective experiences of the three present authors, all of
whom are experienced enterprise educators. It took into account the consensus found in the 2008 ISBE education plenary (Penaluna et al., 2008) by authors who are normally delivering within significantly different contexts. Moreover, all authors are actively engaged with research and development, as opposed to solely research and publication, as advocated by Gibb (2005). They ‘practise what they preach’ within continuous cycles of development and enhancement. Thus the research methodology attempts to respond to concerns that ‘each discipline views entrepreneurship from its own perspective without taking cognisance of approaches in other disciplines’ (Henry et al., 2005, p 99) and that ‘entrepreneurship as a discipline is fragmented among specialists who make little use of each other’s work’ (Ucbasaran et al., 2001, p 58). The authors are not passive observers but have learned from participating in the shared practices of the education community and ‘lived in the world’ (Fuller and Unwin, 1998; Sikes and Potts, 2008). Those involved in a particular ‘community’ understand its constraints and have learnt ‘within’ a practice, rather than ‘about’ it (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Such insights from ‘practitioner researchers’ (Elliot, 1991), we argue, offer richer contextualization and more meaningful epistemological approaches. We do, however, acknowledge the arguments about considering such a perspective, and its potential lack of objectivity, as an inappropriate ontological stance (Alvesson, 2003; Eikeland, 2006).

Specifically, the survey contained eight questions that were designed to tease out differences amongst educators, including: gender, age, qualifications, employment status and teaching philosophy. Six questions related to curriculum development and two questions to the faculty background of students and the nature of individual subjects available to them to study entrepreneurship. A further six questions focused on organizational issues (class, teaching team sizes, focus of the programmes and their structures). Two open-ended questions also sought to gain insights into the perceived value of enterprise education to the students. These were:

‘In your own words, what do your students gain from studying enterprise?’ (maximum 120 words)

and

‘As an optional question, is there anything you would like to share regarding your aspirations as an educator involved in enterprise education?’ (no word limit).

The aim of our methodology was to give theoretical and conceptual sense to the qualitative and quantitative data obtained. Our initial hypotheses, together with appropriate constructs that underpin the discourse and informed the design of the questions, will be offered in the introductory texts in the findings that follow. A number of discernible integrating themes emerged and, for the purpose of this paper, the key issues identified are considered in terms of consensus and divergence. Our themes are:

1. Overarching contexts;
2. Key influences;
3. Motivational factors;
4. Pedagogy and approaches;
5. Educator priorities – business start-up or personal development;
6. Embedded versus extra curricular; and
7. Future perspectives.

It is important to note that these categories are not intended to be linear or hierarchical, but rather have emerged from patterns identified in the data.

Findings

In all, 142 participants from 34 countries completed the survey. Subject areas ranged from art and design to psychology, veterinary studies and engineering. As anticipated, the majority (57%) were based in business school environments, including one UK business school respondent who noted that the pedagogical approach was positively influenced by personal fine-art undergraduate experiences. Seventy-eight per cent teach in subject-specific environments, leaving only 22% who teach across disciplines. This evidence could indicate a lack of cross-disciplinary cohesion or, conversely, that educators with sector-specific skills are tailoring their delivery to enhance relevance.

Overarching contexts

The respondents had a diverse academic profile, including professors, PhDs and non research-active educators. Forty per cent were female and 60% male, 30% were less than 40 years of age and 70% were over 40.

Teaching contracts varied considerably, though 84% held tenure/permanent positions, 18% were on a fixed term contract and eight per cent were either regular or casual part-time. The teaching commitment varied from teaching full-time on a combination of postgraduate and undergraduate studies to that of a freelance musician employed for two hours a week to deliver a core module ‘Marketing and Self Promotion’ on a final-year music technology programme.

Eighty per cent taught on a combination of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, whilst
only 18% taught at purely undergraduate level. Moreover, only two respondents taught solely at postgraduate level. In terms of team contexts, 47% taught as individuals, 31% in a team of less than five, and 22% taught as part of a team of more than five members. Most respondents valued teaching qualifications: 84% either held a recognized teaching qualification or were working towards one.

We found a distinct divergence in class sizes. Whilst the majority of educators teaching undergraduates had a typical class size of 31–60 (35%), looking at this in isolation could be misleading, as seven per cent only had between 1–15 students and 21% delivered to 100 and over. At postgraduate level, the majority delivered lectures to smaller groups of 1–15 students (37%), but ranged as far as 100+ by two per cent.

Key influences

Assuming some degree of self-study of their own teaching practice (see Beck and Kosnik, 2006, p 18), our hypotheses for key influences were that we would find that:

(1) Educators with first-hand experience of starting a business would be prevalent within the education community. The literature advocates that entrepreneurial learning is enhanced by exposure to entrepreneurs joining classes to work alongside academics (Kuratko, 2005; Hermann, 2008), so we therefore sought to establish the percentage of those with business start-up experience amongst our respondents.

(2) Educators would be influenced to a greater or lesser extent by one or more of the following: their personal experience, other educators, other educators’ texts, other educators’ pedagogical theories, feedback from employers/external stakeholders and feedback from past students.

The data in Table 1 demonstrate the divergence in responses to the question about the most influential factors on approaches to teaching and learning. Most notably, 76% were lecturers with first-hand experience of starting an enterprise, indicating that the practitioner aspect carries significant relevance. Whilst 36% used other educators’ texts either significantly or predominantly, more than 64% either did not use them at all or used them only slightly. This indicates a diminishing role for traditional textbooks in enterprise education and supports findings by Fiet (2001) and Jones and English (2004). This perspective was reinforced by comments such as, ‘I am not even interested in reading about it, and neither are my students’.

Personal experience clearly rates highly, as only one respondent did not cite own experience and only seven respondents considered it to be slight. Feedback from ex-students was higher than anticipated, with over 75% of respondents rating it as significant to their approaches. Over 57% also noted employer and external feedback to be significant influences.

Motivational factors

Anecdotal evidence from conference proceedings and networks indicated that most educators were motivated individuals who engaged with the agenda because of a personal desire to do so. Because all participants in the survey were contacted via educator networks, it was presumed that these individuals were already engaged in E&E developmental activity. This perception was overwhelmingly supported in the survey: 90% reported that they became involved in enterprise education because of their own personal motivation, and only ten per cent because they were instructed to do so.

A view on whether the academics considered themselves to be ‘lone voices’ was not requested in the survey; however, a recurring theme in feedback was their desire to bring about faculty and/or institutional change. Rae et al (2009, p 183) suggest that ‘the role of the enterprising academic is generally overlooked, and that many academics work as lone voices, to bring about cultural change’. This view was broadly supported, as exemplified by the following narrative:
I view my role as a catalyst for change in the midst of good, yet solid, business education in the US. For too long, our business students have been shown corporate jobs as the ultimate goal for pursuing a college degree. Instead, I encourage them to consider how this world would be different if, instead, they began to think of themselves as everyday entrepreneurs both in creating entirely new ventures or in launching new innovations within the confines of an existing corporation. My role as an educator has never been more enjoyable and enlivening as it has been since I began teaching entrepreneurship in 2006.

Pedagogy and approaches
Our hypotheses for pedagogy were that:

1. Educators’ pedagogical approaches would reflect the findings of Peterman and Kenney, (2003) and Kuratko (2005) whose in-depth analysis of business schools identified the use of a combination of theoretical and conceptual approaches, reinforced by detailed analysis of ‘practical’ or ‘real life’; and

Of note is that only six per cent (nine respondents) described their approach to teaching as ‘fully based on experiential exercises’. The majority, some 53% (76 respondents), indicated that their approaches were generally based on experiential exercises with some lectures. Interestingly, 32% (45 respondents) based their delivery on lectures with some practical exercises. These findings offer some support to Matlay and Mitra’s (2002) and Botham and Mason’s (2007) observations that higher education tends to be inflexible in delivering experiential mechanisms. The following are typical responses.

‘[My students gain] Mostly theoretical knowledge. They do some practical exercises and gain experience by starting a student company, but they have to ‘play by the book’ to earn good grades.’

In the context of an educator who is clearly considering the students’ potential for start-up,

‘I firmly believe an experiential learning approach is necessary to inform and build confidence in students thinking of venturing out on their own. The value of my own venture creation experience is invaluable in gaining credibility and building confidence in students.’

In order to gain insights into potential constraints and opportunities perceived by educators, we asked two questions that related to the pressures to conform to existing strategies: first, through external drivers and influences; and, second, within the actual delivery environment. Over half of the respondents (57%) felt free to organize the curriculum in whatever way they chose, with the remainder (43%) feeling pressured to respond to examiners, accreditation boards and policies. This difference became considerably more marked in the learning environment, as only 24% felt pressured to teach in ways that were influenced by colleagues, managers and module descriptors. The remainder, over three-quarters of those surveyed (75%), felt free to teach in whatever manner they chose. In terms of validating the learning environment, these findings are significant because locating consistent and reliable data requires conformity that can be compared and contrasted.

A discovery beyond our hypotheses was found in the narratives – there was a divergence of opinion regarding the merits of using a business plan for learning, teaching and assessment. For example, one respondent observed,

‘Too many courses are based on creating business plans without being grounded in the reality of what the student will actually do upon graduation. My teaching system requires that students develop a firm grasp of what their likely career paths are going to be and incorporate entrepreneurship lessons within that reality.’

Equally, others suggested that:

‘My students gain an appreciation of the vital role entrepreneurship (enterprise) plays in the American economy. For example, in the US, most new jobs are created by small entrepreneurial firms, rather than by large, established companies. Students taking New Venture Creation learn how to write a plan that creates a company around an idea they have developed. Students taking Small Business
Management learn how to assist an actual business with a real business issue."

‘The students gain experience in developing a full blown business plan. They also are exposed to the various issues that must be considered prior to starting a business and the issues that must be dealt with after the business is up and running. The students are exposed to many business owners and professionals who work with small businesses and get real information about what is going on in this area. The end result is that when and if the student does decide to go into business for themselves they have a good understanding of what it will take to accomplish this goal.’

‘...developing a working business plan for a fashion related design product’ [in the context of meaningful outputs].

Of note is Honig’s (2004) analysis which demonstrated that 78 of the top 100 universities in the USA delivered the practicalities and monitored the production of a ‘business plan’ as a popular format for delivery. Our findings are in agreement with this.

Educator priorities – business start-up or personal development?

Our hypotheses for ‘what to teach’ were that:

(1) Educators would provide entrepreneurship education that incorporated personal development (build confidence, foster a desire to achieve and inspire action) business development (business and functional curricula and skills to engage in self-employment and employment) and entrepreneurial skill development (including social skills, networking, creative problem solving, opportunity seeking, selling, interviewing, presentations, group leadership, community cooperation) as advocated by the World Economic Forum (2009); and

(2) Whilst a combination of these elements would be incorporated, the priorities and anticipated outcomes would differ. To a lesser or greater extent educators would anticipate their students engaging in business start-up either during or within one year of graduation.

This is where the greatest divergence was identified in the quantitative responses and further illuminated by the narratives. Educators were asked about the extent to which their underlying emphasis/priority for their module was business start-up and personal development. The findings showed that, at 58%, the majority of respondents indicated an equal focus for business start-up and personal development. However divergence was demonstrated in that:

- Only 16% focused on business start-up, with less direct consideration of personal development, whilst 27% focused on personal development, and with less direct consideration of business start-up;
- The majority of educators (75%) anticipated that less than 20% of their students would start a business while still studying: this ranged from 15% who estimated that between 20 and 40% of their students would do so, and only four per cent who estimated that more than 80% would start up; and
- In terms of starting a business within one year of their studies, the majority of educators (53%) anticipated that less than 20% of their students would start up: however, 35% estimated between 20 and 40% would and only two per cent suggested that more than 80% would do so.

It should be noted that these findings do not take into consideration the extent to which these results are influenced by educators delivering an elective module or other forms of self-selection. These students could, potentially, have a high propensity towards business start-up. The following narratives are indicative of the divergent stances offered.

‘The tendency to teach the subject as a start-up situation ignores the fundamental aspect of creativity inherent within the entrepreneurial construct.’

[My students gain knowledge of] ‘...how to recognize an opportunity and how to start-up a business’.

‘I would like to see at least 50% of my students self-employed.’

These comments confirmed that confidence building was a crucial element of the studies, with the suggestion that the modules developed these skills in a unique, more effective manner than other studies.

‘My experience shows that students exposed to enterprise education have better personal development (soft skills – management skills) and also experience with the real world. Unusually are more ambitious and can lead challenging projects demanded in the workshop.’

‘Students realize: that setting up a business is not rocket science; that they can do it; that enterprise is not just about business and finance and accounting; that they are actually more
entrepreneurial that they thought; that studying enterprise is different from studying the other subjects they do at university.’

**Embedded versus extra curricular**

Our hypothesis was that:

1. E&E education was being embedded by an indeterminate number of educators, utilizing a breadth of new pedagogic methodology, as evidenced from networks and contemporary literature (Hytti and O’Gorman, 2004; Harris and Deacon, 2010; Jones, 2011).

Or, conversely, that:

2. Educators and their institutions might not meet the challenges and considerations posed by such methods, which were observed by Smith et al’s paper (2006, p 555) as ‘unlikely to be adopted in any substantial way’ (see also Botham and Mason, 2007).

Pedagogy has also been discussed above. Educators were asked to confirm the various modes of studying enterprise that were available to their students. Eighty-six per cent provided stand-alone and specialized modules, 56% provided embedded learning in their chosen subject areas (for example, engineering) and 60% offered extra-curricular activities, such as enterprise clubs and societies. The narratives included numerous calls for the embedding of E&E education.

‘Mainstream the subject and make in-curricular equally as important as extra-curricula for delivery of the topic.’

‘I would like enterprise education to be required of all business students in the US.’

‘Socially engaged professionals from artists to zoologists find the curriculum suitable for all work fields . . . informed decision-making, innovative management and value creation.’

There was evidence that E&E education is being embedded in some institutions within the employability agenda:

‘We are revalidating all courses to focus on the employability and this will continue to change the normal methods of delivery by HEs.’

The value of unaccredited education was also highlighted:

‘Don’t underestimate the value of unaccredited education. But also we mustn’t underestimate the value of enterprise for those groups who would not necessarily consider it an imperative for themselves.’

Indications of enterprise being firmly embedded without using overt enterprise and entrepreneurship terminology (and therefore which potentially would not be captured in traditional surveys) is evidenced in narratives such as:

‘My students do not study Enterprise overtly (unless they opt to take certain extra curricula activities offered by our Enterprise Unit) however they are stimulated to recognize their ability to be creative and as a result of exposure to an industry linked real problem solving project activity they come to recognise the commercial opportunities and pressures that exist on real enterprises. Opportunities are then promoted so that those students who wish to can explore enterprise more fully.’

Such responses indicate a strategy that has been termed ‘learning by stealth’, in which enterprising skills, knowledge and behaviours are introduced to students in a seamless manner, without a formal label to identify the activity (Redding and Cato, 2011).

**Future perspectives**

The following discourse highlights other themes that emerged from the narratives; the examples cited are the issues raised by respondents. Where appropriate, we make reference to existing literature.

The key findings of the 2010 International Entrepreneurship Educators Conference are summarized as the IEEC2010 Concordat. Following a live delegate feedback session, there were five key calls for action. The third of these called for ‘Clarity of impact measures and associated funding priorities so that we can work to develop a more sustainable, transparent and appropriate approach to developing these capacities’ (IEEC Concordat, 2010). Our research notes a key issue that supports this declaration. The pressure for educators to publish was highlighted; and educators are attempting to prioritize being a good educator over the requirement to be research active. This ‘teaching–research conflict’ (Botham and Mason, 2007, p 98) was clear in the responses:

‘My main challenge is the fact that I am not a “professional researcher”. I do not publish articles about theories of entrepreneurship ... What matters more for me is the pedagogy of entrepreneurship, ie how (best) to teach it.’
‘I am increasingly aware that many enterprise educators are trapped in the sense that in order to progress your career academically it is necessary to publish extensively. However my passion is for work-based and work relevant teaching around enterprise, innovation and employability. This focus provides little in the way of career progression options and leaves me, sadly, wondering whether I can afford to remain within HEI delivered enterprise education.’

In their study of good practice in the UK, Botham and Mason (2007, p 98) suggested that ‘...some of the best enterprise education is found in the less research-orientated HEIs’. Comments such as the second narrative above could indicate a potential area of concern if it is representative of a greater number of E&E educators. Moreover, given Botham and Mason’s (2007, p 97) observation that

‘...staff resources and skills for teaching entrepreneurship are in short supply. In many cases, teaching is dependent on one or two highly committed individuals. Should these individuals leave, it is often far from clear that any enterprise education would continue’...

such individuals could be the cornerstone of enterprise opportunities afforded to students. The topic of assessment also aligns with the concerns expressed in the IEEC Concordat, because it – assessment – was raised frequently in independent narratives:

‘Wouldn’t it be great if business and management students had their own studio space, that they had to create something to sell, that they had to produce marketing materials, that they exhibited their work, which they presented and exhibited their ideas, that they didn’t have to sit a 2-hour exam to be assessed?’

This call would also appear to align with the observations of Shuell (1986, p 429) who suggests that,

‘if students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner the teachers fundamental task is to get students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving those outcomes ... what the student does in determining what is learned is more important than what the teacher does.’

In turn, Biggs (2003) outlines his process of constructive alignment, a balancing of desirable outcomes, learning activities and assessment procedures.

**Conclusions**

Our findings indicate that some assumptions, such as motivational factors in the education community surveyed, have been supported and that broader metrics than simply the number of business start-ups are being employed. However, the research–practitioner tension is strongly evident, and the reliance on real business experience appears to outweigh the demand for an extensive knowledge of academic discourse. We are reminded that E&E education is forever emergent, connected to the realities of society and linked to our students’ current and future roles, many of which we cannot claim to forecast. E&E educators have illuminated the dual challenge of seeking to be relevant to their students’ needs as well as gaining legitimacy for their teaching practice, providing choice to diverse cohorts of students and remaining true to the unique teaching philosophy (of each educator). This aspiration can be seen in the learning environment and delivery strategies: the overwhelming response, of more than three-quarters of those surveyed, was that they felt they were able to teach in whatever manner they chose, without either pressure resulting from the views of colleagues and managers or using guidance such as module descriptors. Moreover, this freedom continues into curriculum development for 57% of respondents, suggesting that uniformity of delivery approaches is an extremely difficult target to attain when evaluating outputs in meaningful ‘constructively aligned’ (Biggs, 2003) ways.

It is clear that many entrepreneurship educators see their role as pioneering, and that they actively engage in developing E&E education rather than merely administering its delivery. For example, when the high rate of occurrence of first-hand start-up business experience by entrepreneurship educators is acknowledged, the notion of best practice becomes highly problematic, especially if viewed purely through an academic lens. Moreover, as teaching philosophies are clearly part academic and part practical, the increasing use of the term ‘pracademics’ (Penaluna et al, 2008) seems increasingly appropriate. Most respondents are driven by personal experience as opposed to being informed by literature or research-based activities, preferring to work to responses from alumni and broader-based stakeholders than to be led by academic debate. There is also a sense that the literature does not take sufficient interest beyond the business school perspective, or that a sufficiently loud academic voice has yet emerged which supports
the perspectives articulated in the responses to our questions.

We therefore argue that our initial research in this area has further highlighted the need to understand better the contextual differences on which higher education E&E education is built. Indeed, we see the need to capture such heterogeneity through active engagement with the opinions of all stakeholders, not simply academic literature that has evolved primarily from business school contexts and associated research methodologies. Importantly, we need to understand better the views of ‘pracademic’/entrepreneurial educators and to discover what they believe E&E education should and could be. Future investigations should also accommodate other external groups such as enterprise clubs and investors who are increasingly become more relevant to the student experience and actual start-up activity and associated issues of sustainability.

In conclusion, we feel that there is far more to learn about the context of E&E education in higher education than what we currently know. A question that has arisen, for example, is what do the 4.3% of educators (6 responses) who claim to anticipate 80% start-up rates do that is different from the activities of the other respondents? – and, further, can they justify these expectations; and, is it merely that these cohorts are already engaged in a business activity or will have propensity to engage in freelance activities?

Whilst there is insufficient space in this paper to investigate the finer detail of the issues that the data set offers, or to offer answers to questions that the research has highlighted, we felt that this was an appropriate point at which to disseminate our initial findings. It should be noted that our intention is to develop the research through additional interactions with the respondents: hence this paper is an integral part of an ongoing and, as yet, incomplete investigation.

Notes

1SurveyMonkey™ is a commercial, Web-based service that facilitates, as required, questionnaire design, data capture and analysis. See also: http://www.surveymonkey.com/.

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