

СЕКЦІЯ 4. ПСИХОЛОГО-ПЕДАГОГІЧНІ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ

DOI

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AS KEY PILLARS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION

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In this paper we will apply reflexive dialogical practice [1, 2] methodology in order to explore the place of Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and Self-Directed Learning Theory (SDLT) in Entrepreneurial Education (EE). Specifically, this paper presents an intersection of expertise from both the entrepreneurship and education disciplines, in order to explore the challenges and opportunities of employing both ELT and SDLT in EE.

We believe this work to be a valuable contribution to the literature as SDLT and ELT are, theoretically, important – perhaps fundamental – pedagogical pillars of EE, but the research fields of pedagogy and EE rarely combine to complement each other to identify these interconnections. This work represents a provocation piece intended as a critical engagement between these two research fields.

1. The importance of “learning” in Entrepreneurial Education

Currently a wide range of teaching methods and models are utilised across EE programmes; these are often informed by practical considerations, as opposed to a rigorous pedagogical rationale [3, 4]. Subsequently, there continues to be disagreement in the EE community on how best to teach EE [5, 6]. This disagreement is exacerbated by the struggle to pinpoint the exact educational outcomes that are desirable for its participants [7, 8].

What is clear however is that *learning* is pivotal to the entrepreneurship process – from nascent entrepreneurs to established serial entrepreneurs –

learning is a key part of EE and entrepreneurship [9, 10]. Researchers have identified that seeing entrepreneurial learning as solely a process of resource generation is limited, but rather engaging in the process of learning also has the potential to lead to personal growth [11, 12]. Specifically, two central and important outcomes of entrepreneurial learning are that it enables the entrepreneur an ability to be (a) proactive to identify and exploit business opportunities [13, 14], and (b) adaptive in order to solve or resolve business problems as and when they arise [10].

EE pedagogical research regarding an understanding of the entrepreneurial learning process is rapidly growing but is afflicted with challenges of fragmentation and incoherence [9, 15]. In particular, EE is often criticised for its perceived disconnect from the theories and concepts of the education discipline [16], a challenge compounded by being traditionally designed by and delivered from Business Schools [17]. So far, the single most unifying aspect of EE delivery across the globe is the agreement that ELT theory has thus far served as a useful base on which to build EE pedagogy due to the inherently practical nature of entrepreneurship [4, 5, 14, 15].

2. Experiential Learning Theory

ELT is widely accepted and encouraged in the EE curriculum with the dominant narrative that ELT is the appropriate model to enable learning “through” entrepreneurship [18, 19, 20]. ELT emphasises the importance of real-world experience, whereby knowledge is created through experience and aided by an individual’s unique processes of reflection [21, 22]. EE teaching and learning activities are now commonplace modelled upon ELT [e.g. 5, 23].

However, ELT is complex – which might explain why ELT is often misunderstood. For example, although the original model of ELT from Kolb [22] and more recent versions [24] may be at first glance eyeballed and depicted as a cyclic model; ELT however proposes that the learning process is one that represents a spiral rather than a circle [22]. Concomitantly ELT takes time and resources to fully implement [24]. Therefore, this is the first point in which we will delve deeper and engage in critical reflexive dialogue concerning: RQ1: Does the complexity of ELT prevent the full realisation of ELT in EE?

3. Self-Directed Learning Theory

Perhaps due to the complexity of ELT, and for other reasons (including lack of depth and breadth of pedagogical knowledge of business educators), other key and important pedagogical theories may be pushed aside, or side-

lined, in EE research and practice. We believe SDLT is an example of a pedagogical theory that has potential to add huge value in the field and practice of EE.

Recent research on SDLT in entrepreneurship has identified self-directed learning competence as a “meta-competence” for entrepreneurs [10]. Fostering this competence means that entrepreneurs can build other competencies. SDLT concerns a process of learning in which learners – with or without the help of others – set their own learning goals, identify their own learning resources and self-evaluate their learning strategies and outcomes [25, 26].

Indeed, SDLT has a strong alignment with EE programmes in that they commonly identify the need to foster entrepreneurship students’ autonomy, which is a key aspect of successful leadership in entrepreneurship [27, 28]. In this paper, we identify SDLT as a key theoretical pillar of EE and ask: RQ2: What place does SDLT have in EE?

4. Interlocking Experiential and Self-Directed Learning Theory

We will finish by summarising the key insights gleaned in the reflexive dialogue and in doing so present key directions for further research. We will discuss SDLT and ELT – not as separate entities – but as an interlocking process.

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