

Contradictions at play

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In the light of globalization, educational restructuring policy, based on a kind of logic of competition and market-driven reform, have swept around the world (Adie, 2008; Ball, Goodson & Maguire, 2007). As Ball (2003) points out, entrepreneurship is a part of this new policy of education, and in the discursive interventions into the public sector they bring into play, and interest in entrepreneurship education has flourished in recent years (Rodrigues, 2007). This development has been fairly similar in the USA and in Europe, including the former Eastern European states (Mitra & Matlay, 2004), and entrepreneurship education as a mean to generate business start-ups and, in turn, economic growth, has attracted increasingly great political interest (Holmgren & From, 2005).

One aspect of the globalization and the educational restructuring policy is the weakening and sidelining of educators, educational researchers and Ministries of Education when it comes to educational policy and reform agendas. At the same time, the power and influence of Ministries of Finance and Economic Development on educational policy have increased (Power, 2007). With this in mind, there are good reasons for taking a somewhat closer look at the writings on entrepreneurship education. Viewed as a part of the new policy technologies of education reform the writings contributes to changes in how we talk and think of education (cf. Ball, 2003), and the aim of this paper is to discuss entrepreneurship education as educational policy. The discussion is based on an overview of research literature on entrepreneurship education (From, 2009).

Entrepreneurship education

Since there is no unified definition of entrepreneurship (Leffler & Svedberg, 2005), there are also different views on, and different models of, how entrepreneurship education should be conducted. However, there are some common features - the students' own activities, doing, is regarded not only as the best way of learning entrepreneurship but also as a way of changing their attitudes and values. The ideal teaching is that the students should 'see, touch and feel' entrepreneurship (Cooper, Bottomley & Gordon, 2004). In order to further reflect real entrepreneurship in real conditions, competitive items are also regarded as important features of the teaching, not least in order to train exposure to competition and make the students feel like winners (cf. Hannon, Collins & Smith, 2005). Competition is on the whole described as a central teaching method in the literature, and the idea is said to be that the best students are rewarded.

Irrespective of what model of entrepreneurship education is dealt with, the literature on this area is characterized by a positive attitude to entrepreneurship (Henry, Hill & Leitch, 2003). One consequence of the positive attitude is that a great number of presumed favorable effects of entrepreneurship education are emphasized. One ambition seems to be to broaden the economic argumentation for entrepreneurship education to comprising more personal qualities of human benefit, such as creativity, innovativeness, and so on, and the qualities are described as a kind of necessary civil competence applicable in all situations of life.

Entrepreneurship education is thereby given a general value, beyond the economic sphere, as something that is good for everybody (Formica, 2002). Since entrepreneurship education is thereby considered to

benefit both society and individuals, it is regarded as both necessary and reasonable that everybody should have access to it.

However, irrespective of how all-embracingly the usefulness of entrepreneurship education is formulated, it is linked to the potential that the education is considered to have, rather than to its actual results (cf. Holmgren, From, Olofsson, Karlsson, Snyder & Sundström, 2005). The conviction of this potential, that is, of a causal relationship between education and a desired outcome, is a normative standpoint rather than an empirical observation (cf. Peterman & Kennedy, 2003). The active recommendation of entrepreneurship education can therefore, according to Locke & Schöne (2004), be understood as a manifestation of an ideological conviction of future progress. This ideological conviction might also explain why the arguments for entrepreneurship education are similar, irrespective of which educational model that is advocated.

Things are not always what they seem to be

Entrepreneurship education is described as something new in relation to so-called traditional education. A somewhat closer look at the underlying rationale reveals a different picture, however. The rationale of entrepreneur education appears rather to be an uncomplicated input-output model, where the desired results are expected to be produced, if only the right content is put in and treated in the right way (Van der Kuip & Verheul, 2004). The complexity of the processes in educational practice, and the recontextualizing that characterizes educational practice (Bernstein, 1996), is overseen. The focus is instead on directions/action guidelines about how the right input should result in the right output, ultimately a greater number of business starts.

A fundamental problem with these types of action instructions is that they treat teaching as if it was conducted in a social vacuum, when, on the contrary, a great number of social factors determine what will materialize in a real teaching process and the conditions for learning that are provided. All types of organized education are constructed, not nature-given, learning environments. Human interaction in these institutions therefore has a special framework, and takes place under special conditions setting their mark on the action. Any concrete teaching practice is also always culturally situated, including culturally embedded meanings and values. There is a whole body of research underlying the importance and impact of the local context (Kelchtermans, 2007), but the detailed action instructions in the writings on entrepreneurship education on the contrary seems to presuppose that schools and teachers are passive executors of external instructions.

A great deal of the literature on entrepreneurship education may therefore be seen as a manifestation of an ideology in a negative sense, since critical thinking of the conditions of teaching is prevented or made impossible. Entrepreneurship education is thereby 'false', in the sense that it can never fulfill its own claims, but its shortcomings will always (to those involved) appear to be the result of the directions not having been fully followed (Blankertz, 1987).

Entrepreneurship education therefore lands in a contradictory relation to other education and to research on education. At the same time as entrepreneurship education is described as something new that is to/should complement, or even replace, what is called traditional education, this presumed new education is not new but a manifestation of something that the traditional education in a sense has already left behind. The fact that what is said to be new is not new, and that what is said to be traditional is maybe newer than this so-called new, appears rather as an inherent contradiction in the field, but it is not the only contradiction that comes to light when reading the literature.

If entrepreneurship is about what in general terms can be described as the individual's unique behavior, the question is how this relates to the homogenizing influence of education. As Baldacchino (2009, p 196) puts it: ".....is it a contradiction in terms to seek to foster entrepreneurship via the formal educational system?". Should everybody develop his or her own unique creativity and innovativeness by means of the same education (cf. Koch, 2003)? Should this unique creativity and innovativeness be examined and marked according to national or international criteria (cf. De Clerc, Cerjins & Ooghe, 2001)? Is education that is socially and culturally decontextualized and does not reflect ethical dimensions (cf. Webster, 2003), and that is based on a view of human beings according to which, "All individuals act in their "self-interest" maximizing their utility." (Kent & Anderson, 2003, p. 30), compatible with the underlying values and overall educational goals of general education?

Final remarks

Given the contradictions above discussed, entrepreneurship education might be seen as nothing else than the emperor's new clothes, that is, old stuff described in new words. However, regarded as a part of the new policy technologies of education reform, the writings on entrepreneurship education, as earlier mentioned, contribute to changes in how we talk and think of education. Concerning the shift of power from Ministries of Education to Ministries of Finance when it comes to influencing educational policy (Power, 2007), entrepreneurship education seems in itself to be a carrier of the language and the values of the latter. Following Bernstein's (1996) line of reasoning it is quite obvious that entrepreneurship education is managed by the principles of the market and its managers. One recent example is an offer, managed by Nutek, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, introduced by Maud Olofsson, the Minister for Enterprise and Energy, Deputy Prime Minister, to Swedish schools during 2009 to free of charge have female entrepreneurs visiting and giving lectures. Again following Bernstein (1996), an implication of this shift of power and the new discourse of education is a new concept of knowledge. Knowledge is divorced from the knower; it is separated from the deep structure of the self and literally dehumanized. If this is the case, one might go beyond contradictions at play: "Today perhaps there is not so much a contradiction as a crisis, and what is at stake is the very conception of education itself" (Bernstein, 1996, p. 88).

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