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Published in:
Journal of Higher Education Service Science and Management

Published: 31/12/2019

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal

Citation for published version (APA):

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Download date: 30 Jan 2020
The Normalisation of Enterprising Education:  
*Transatlantic reflections of Approach and Rhetoric between distinct Institutions*

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**Abstract**

The advancing and entrenched of many forms of entrepreneurship and enterprising education, within higher education institutions, is instrumental in the development of entrepreneurship, industry, and the regeneration of society as a whole. However, this development is subject to the resources, capability, and ongoing support available. Inspired by a recent visit to the United States of America by a group of academics, this paper compares two distinct cases of this offering as witnessed through reflective investigation. The findings documented within this paper highlight the issues of programme and institutional focus, the resource effectiveness of different universities, and the levels of educational experiences across continents. In further strengthening this form of education, this paper uniquely presents phases of normalisation for enterprising education, which attempts to address issues of educational environment, approach, rhetoric, and engagement.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship Education; Entrepreneurship; Higher Education; Learning and Teaching; Small Business.

1. Introduction

Progressions in the research and teaching of entrepreneurship, or more generally speaking, enterprising education, has had an evident impact on students (Gorman et al., 1997; Béchard and Grégoire, 2005; Audretsch, 2006; Acs, 2007). It burdens new responsibility for institutions and organisations, worldwide. As universities attempt to improve this offering, the emergence of more definitive approaches (*pedagogical stance*) and rhetoric (*held and stated beliefs*) of enterprise has increased. Of benefit to academics and practitioners, this embracing, enterprising ideology prioritises lateral thinking and autonomous aspiration. For example, flexible learning spaces and the adoption of advancing technology, which supports contextualised learning, equips students to centralise entrepreneurial ideas within desired and real-world contexts, towards both viable and entrepreneurial solutions (Anderson and Jack, 2008).

Challenging realities such as human and financial resource acquisition and allocation, along with embracing the overall enterprise agenda have been widely noted as strong determinants of successful, enterprising education implementation (Clark, 1998; Fayolle and Redford, 2014; Fitriati et al., 2013). Disparities in institutional dynamism, and the enterprising drive of students, staff, and existent learning relationships, are however consistent. Future objectives and strategically-outlined potential are dependent on the balancing of unique, enterprising visions and realistic capabilities (Jones, 2010; Edwards and Muir, 2012). For many reasons, universities realise differing levels of success. Whether it is from operational and teaching excellence, or receiving research, grant, or consultancy funding, universities experience these differences and adapt within their means and with respect to their aspirations. This does, however, expectantly result in a fragmented nature of delivery, assessment, and network capability between teaching, research, and consultancy-level engagement.

Empirical investigation, which has examined the various approaches to entrepreneurship and enterprise education over the past 25 years, has moulded institutional identities (Hytti and O’Gorman, 2004; Gedeon, 2014; Kitagawa et al., 2015). This reinforces the need for guided, comparative assessment of the current state of universities and their proclivity towards enterprising activity.

The aim of this paper is to investigate, through comparative case study involving two higher education institutions, the approaches and rhetoric of enterprising education within the university context. This paper reflects on the approach and rhetoric between two international institutions within Scotland and the United States of America, which enables distinct differences of understanding and objective to be witnessed. This is evidenced in the conception, delivery, assessment, and maintenance of modules and whole programmes. Approaches and perspectives of these two institutions are scrutinised against existing pedagogical expectations and best practices. Notably, aspects involving economies of scale and scope are also central to this discussion. This paper draws upon and reflects on the many comparisons and differences, in establishing unified considerations and advancing conceptualisations for teachers, researchers, and university academics alike.
This paper begins with a brief review of core and surrounding enterprising education literature, highlighting various themes and topics. This literature, within the field, includes enterprising education approach, delivery, and the classroom environment. From this, a discussion on approach and rhetoric follows, as the investigated institutional context is outlined. An overview of the methodological approach is presented, along with the reflective findings. The paper then closes with a novel, conceptual response, and a discussion of the wider implications and future research opportunities for the field.

### Entrenching Enterprising Education

Many forms of entrepreneurship or enterprising education is now widely established within most universities (Gorman et al., 1997; Brockhaus et al., 2001; Benneworth and Osborne, 2015). These entrepreneurial universities adopt many methods of delivery and assessment, which align with many core disciplines which are taught at higher education level (Gibb et al., 2007; Gibb et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2018). These include business and small business viability; economic theory; leadership and management skills towards business ownership and management; sociological aspects, considering the societal good, and political impacts; and, market awareness and stakeholder and brand appreciation (Binks et al., 2006; Gimmon, 2014). As higher education has evolved, the demands of industry and entrepreneurially-minded students has significantly changed the educational landscape. As a result, a prevailing issue, for universities today, include possessing the ability to target new and continuing students, realising successful attempts at emboldening certificated programmes and bolstering the unique institutional identity (Binks et al., 2006; Acs, 2007; EC, 2015). Nevertheless, with differing educational landscapes being a harsh reality, teaching and research activities are however fragmented. Therefore, towards greater comparability, revisions of institutional focus, and course teaching and assessment are required in optimising the enterprising offering made by universities.

There were somewhat isolated instances of entrepreneurship education, from the 1950s, due to the expansion of markets and explosion of information (Alberti, 1999; Brockhaus et al., 2001). These were seen predominantly within North America and Western Europe. The increase in popularity and growth, moving into and during the 1980s, led to a number of executive and strategic management-related programmes (Brockhaus et al., 2001; Fayolle and Redford, 2014). A settling from this period, moving into the beginning of the 21st century, brought about diverse topicality, reasoned pedagogies, and a whole host of assessments as core selling-points of institutions (Gibb et al., 2007; Murray et al., 2018). This increased diversity and widened aim in entrepreneurship education programmes dilute chiefly capitalistic connotations which are previously associated with many finance and business related courses. This divergence in understanding and premise for practical, contextual teaching and learning outcomes are represented through the development of relevant literature (Audretsch, 2006; Anderson and Jack, 2008; Dodd and Hynes, 2012). In turn, expectations from the classroom are altered as the dynamic shifts to a student-centric or ‘flipped’ classroom approach. This is also partly down to the existing and enduring definitional differences, impacting on the approach and representation of beliefs with regards to enterprising behaviours and entrepreneurship (Aldrich, 2012; Benneworth and Osborne, 2015).

#### 1.1. Entrepreneurship Education Approach

Putting aside the various factors which undoubtedly affect entrepreneurship education delivery and advancement, such as: prioritisation of finances, talent, organisational structure, and dominant university cultures, the plethora of approaches and practical methods of teaching are now widely known (Draycott and Rae, 2011; Gedeon, 2014; Scuotto and Murray, 2018). These methods are now disseminated globally, with the longstanding support of international institutions and academic groups who are focussed on entrepreneurially-enriching higher education. Notably, these have resulted in a number of heavily utilised publications, which guide the 21st century educator and provide meaningful examples of how to embed enterprising models of teaching and industry engagement (EC, 2012; 2013; 2015; Universities Scotland, 2016). This has vindicated the prior research and strides within the sector, which have been witnessed in the field, and further emboldens the teaching teams who practice and reflect business realities from within the classroom environment (Jones, 2011; 2013; Dodd and Hynes, 2012).

These approaches have evolved from the directed business planning, defence, and presentation methods, which are rooted in the subject’s economic and business foundations, to role playing, scenario setting, reflective appreciation or feasibility study, and real-time networking involving idea incubatory or business accelerator activities (Gibb et al., 2007; Bacigalupo et al., 2016). When aligned to the aims and learning outcomes of overarching programmes and university values, this diversity in teaching approach increases the value and purpose of entrepreneurship within university. Of course, as stated within this paper, pervasive economic and political factors can encourage or impede such pedagogical development.

It is commonplace that these many forms of entrepreneurship or enterprising education reside within the business school or faculty. However, the evolved and multidisciplinary nature of the subject allows for greater and wider application amongst other academic departments. Examples of this includes the ‘STEM’ subjects of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, to creative industries and media subjects, to witnessing...
benefits towards public and private health services, medicine, and nursing. Exposure to creative and innovative activities result in new ideas which address current issues and overcome new challenges (Barringer and Ireland, 2012; Roberts et al., 2019).

1.2. Institutional Rhetoric for Enterprise

A key aspect of developing entrepreneurship education, especially since the progressive application of ‘best practice’ being witnessed within universities and their networks, is for entrepreneurial institutions to appropriately state, either in word, action, or culture, their enterprising intentions and what they value (Beresford and Beresford, 2010; Ribeiro et al., 2018; Crammond, 2019). By rhetoric, this paper refers to the particular stance that the given university takes, what they regard as important towards their very being and operations, and what they intend to do in future activities.

A previous buzzword within higher education, the behaviours and practices now attributed to entrepreneurship now require institutions to represent their beliefs and ambitions with particular strengths and unique selling points, which may attract new applicants to their place of learning.

In projecting this rhetoric, the enterprising stance set should respect the given structure of the institution, and furthermore be applicable to all corners and departments within it. Inspirational and energetic leadership is required, in order for increasingly popular entrepreneurship education to be implemented further across disciplines. This argument concerning structure and culture has been part of more contemporary research with regards to institutionalising enterprise and how it can reform the nature and purpose of higher education, not only generally but more specifically within geographical and subject-specific contexts (see Nelles and Vorley, 2010a; 2010b; 2011).

2. Educational Ideals & Institutional Impacts

This paper illustrates (Figure 1) the broad, but connected skill sets which typically introduce and highlight the requirements of graduates and expectations of industry and small business. These include skills related to personal, interpersonal, professional, and crucially, enterprising aspects of the individual post-certification:

![Fig. 1 Categorised Skill Sets for Enterprising Education](image)

During the course of a degree, industry, or enterprising programme, it is anticipated that various personal attributes are witnessed. These include, amongst others: responsibility and taking the initiative; evidencing effort; and, showing keen ambition to achieve what was initially set out in previous objectives or overall aims. As these attributes are shown within classroom or workplace contexts, a variety of interpersonal attributes are desired, but are also needed, in order for a common and enterprising goal to be achieved. These include: communicating amongst valued stakeholders (Scott et al., 2018; Crammond, 2019); being considerate towards numerous viewpoints and perspectives; and, maintaining collegiality in pursuing these goals.
Whether it be individually, or as part of an organisation, professionalism contributes towards better practice, consistency, and the garnering of trust from both the internal and external environments. Particular traits which promote this include: being responsive; asserting correct and suitable leadership; and, coordinating tasks accordingly.

Finally, the above elements of Figure 1 are all fundamental aspects towards shaping the creative and innovative individual. However, it is by continually being enterprising that valuable, viable, and marketable products, services, and brands can flourish for the benefit of given industries and wider society. Just a few examples of being enterprising include: being creative and contemplating the ‘new’; being attentive to people, their opinions, and general market surroundings; and finally, possessing the various forms of capital which allow you to be innovative (see Crammond et al., 2018; Crammond, 2019).

3. The Transatlantic Context

This paper concerns two distinct, educational institutions (one from Scotland; the other from the United States of America) which are rooted in industry and commercially-driven backgrounds. Both have particular teaching and research interests, which impacts on the expected, and existing aims, reach, and methods of delivery and assessment which are apparent. A brief description is given below:

Scotland
Its current form was established in 2007 after a merger with a local college. With over 15,000 students enrolled, the university teaches and researches from five campuses within the United Kingdom. The institution has firm roots (stretching back from the 1830s) in technology, science, business, and design, and has since grown to deliver a number of courses in other disciplines. These include nursing, education, psychology, and media.

United States of America
Established in the mid-1800s, this institution is a private university with a focus on science, engineering, and technology teaching and research. Located in the state of Massachusetts, it is known worldwide as an innovative institution, consistently ranking very high or top of league tables. Graduates from this institution have founded numerous, well-known businesses and brands.

4. Method

This initial reflection in understanding apparent educational normalisation, with regards to enterprising education, was inspired by a recent visit to North America during the winter of 2018. In collaboration with the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), representatives from fourteen of Scotland’s nineteen higher education institutions travelled to a university in the United States of America to understand the ways in which the institution equips budding entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to succeed. The purpose of this trip was to understand how entrepreneurship education was delivered by those across the Atlantic, towards informing a Scottish programme for scaling up businesses. During the three day visit, the Scottish team enjoyed numerous sessions and presentations, which showcased the institution’s unique culture, in what became a fact-finding mission involving the generation of ideas and collaborative practice between Scotland’s institutions. Adopting an ethnographic stance, the findings discussed within this paper are perspectives and discussion points which are recalled by the author.

5. Findings

Experiences and recollections from the international visit heightened the appreciation of both the approach and rhetoric which is institutionally entrenched within both universities. The findings from this paper’s reflective observation can be thematically listed, as follows: Institutional Resources; Autonomy and Expression; Cultural Uniqueness; and finally, Commercial Engagement.

Institutional Resources
Both institutions offer, although differently, a productive mix of courses which are conducive to positive, entrepreneurship or enterprising education. These courses include practical approaches to business, management, leadership, engineering, finance, and innovation. These are typically part of a core suites of courses which are encouraged to be undertaken during the duration of the programme. Additionally, a number of these courses employ practical assessment which must be undertaken in a group-based setting. However, differences in rigidity between institutions results again in this weakened exposure to enterprise where a focus on enterprising skill sets can be secondary. Nevertheless, the programmes where this is the case are due to the programme focus being more on organisational studies and management disciplines. A lack of an entrepreneurship-centric programme is the key issue, where and when this restriction arises.
Autonomy and Expression
A distinct difference between both institutions was the continuous onus on a student’s initiative when it concerned entrepreneurship and the development of their own, new ideas. Classroom experiences differ between student-led discussion, and more rigid, didactic methods primarily involving a weekly lecture, then brief tutorial session set up. With regards to suitably aligning with enterprising education, sessions within these more definitive courses were idea enabling, not instructive or facilitated by imparting theoretical knowledge. A strong learning-by-doing approach is seen, but predictably varies between these theoretical and more practice focused courses.

Cultural Uniqueness
Both institutions wish to reaffirm their contemporary values and strong, supportive stance towards students. Programmes and operations, by surrounding non-academic departments within the university, reflect the functions and interactions of an entrepreneur and small business. These are predominantly provided by careers and employability engagement teams.

Commercial Engagement
There was a substantial difference witnessed between both institutions, with regards to resource acquisition and commercial engagement. Aspects of financial and human resource, and commercial engagement, supports ongoing and valuable exposure to real-world influences and enables entrepreneurial legacies to be built.

6. Discussion: The Normalisation of Enterprising Education

This paper conceptualises a cycle of normalisation of enterprising education, asserting phases upon which a number of activities, considerations, and perspectives are both witnessed and shared. The four phases highlight the evolved transition of educational programmes, modules, or short courses (pedagogical approach), or institutional position or sustained, core values (rhetoric) which shape the modern, industry-focused, educational institution. The four phases include: Institutional Setting and environmental considerations; the implemented Approach for teaching, learning, research, and consultancy; the projected Rhetoric adopted by course leaders, researchers, and university management and principals; and, finally, the level of Engagement and nurturing of relationships in continuing this normalisation and entrenching of enterprising education and industry-linked activities.

Fig 2. Phases of Normalisation in Enterprising Education
The figure above considers the findings from this paper’s comparative case study evidence, as well as reflecting upon other frameworks which depict the advancing of entrepreneurship or enterprising education within university as a phased or gradual process of institutional strengthening towards greater business relevancy (see Crammond et al., 2018). Previous, consultative works and practical illustrations have attempted to, through applicable modelling and helpful guidance, encourage inclusivity and wider stakeholder engagement with the adoption of supportive classroom techniques for session, course, or comprehensive programme re-development. Table 1 highlights core considerations and aspirations, per phase, aligned with the desired and anticipated skill set categories: personal, interpersonal, professional, and enterprising.

**Setting**
For the individual, programme suitability aids in the motivation of entrepreneurially-minded students. During the course of a given period of study, students wishing to embark upon entrepreneurialism may become isolated or frustrated when undertaking a relatively rigid degree programme (Brockhaus et al, 2001; Binks et al., 2006; Crammond, 2019). If the classroom and college or university experience attempts to be unique in its offering, again it adds purpose and may establish a sense of belonging with students of all backgrounds. This, in both an educational and commercial sense, affirms the institution’s position as a productive hub for enterprise (Kitagawa et al, 2015).

**Approach**
Of course, the student experience is directly impacted by the pedagogical approach adopted by course and programme leaders (Gibb et al., 2007). The enterprising environment, whether it be in education or industry, is strengthened by increased autonomy and empowerment bestowed on those learning and developing. In the classroom, creating participatory learning ‘events’ become memorable experiences where aspects of problem solving and situational leadership are met with role playing and scenario setting. As a result, the institution’s capacity and capability to perform entrepreneurial activities is realised.

**Rhetoric**
As the findings have indicated, normalisation is achieved by encouraging skill-centric opportunities. These should be inclusive of many people, whether they have experience of enterprising activities or not, presenting different ideas and perspectives (Friedman and Miles, 2006; Higgins et al., 2013; Crammond, 2019). This capturing of ideas benefits commercial businesses, as more practical elements of education such as value-creative activities are centralised within the educational context (Dodd and Hynes, 2012; Scuotto and Murray, 2018).

**Engagement**
The fourth and final phase focusses on engaging with the desired, industry experience, and through continuously learning-by-doing (Gimmon, 2014). Forms of cross-departmental collaboration, towards wider ecosystems being established, strengthens distinct areas of excellence which promotes enterprising forms of education (Beresford and Beresford, 2010; Ribeiro et al., 2018).

7. **Challenges**

Given this paper’s technical explanation (Table 1) of the phased normalisation outlined, a number of subsequent and considerable challenges are therefore apparent. These are instigated and impacted by the level of, for example, multi-stakeholder and institutional influences, resource capacity and capability, and the continued or aspired culture (Nelles and Vorley, 2011; Crammond, 2019). Many of the differences in both institutional approach and rhetoric, discussed below, were observed in the secondary research and empirical phases of this paper’s research.

Firstly, when contemplating a normalisation of enterprising activity through education, does this involve a focussed or pathed route to certification? Is there real flexibility and choice? A unique selling point for entrepreneurial universities is the level of relevant, business-centric teaching, at all levels of a degree programme.

Secondly, what is the evident balance between teaching excellence devoted to enterprise, and the level of industry experience of small business and entrepreneurial practice? As the strongest resource in sustaining an enterprising rhetoric, affirming the human capital aspect within educational institutions should be rooted towards this practical discipline.

Thirdly, does a cross-department, but mutual vision exist towards enterprising education and societally-beneficial business? The importance of enterprise can be partially determined by the universal message that is projected from all corners and levels of the institution.
8. Implications to Research and Practice

The findings from this paper highlight a need for all educational institutions to internally review both the pedagogical and industry-driven approaches adopted, towards introducing and sustaining enterprising education. Additionally, in response to national reporting and statistics, student feedback, and learning experiences, the way in which enterprising education is championed and sustained, through voice, culture, and action, must also be assessed. An awareness of these, with respect to improving educational journeys, an institution’s purpose, and overall impact places responsibility on academics, researchers, and educators. Section 10 outlines the various research practices which could advance the findings and discussion points from this paper.

9. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the various approaches and rhetoric both adopted and voiced within educational environments. These introduce and sustain a distinct institutional culture, where resources and aims align to meet societal demand. With regards to forms of enterprising or entrepreneurship education, this mirrors the pragmatic nature of enterprise, small business, and innovative organisations, globally. In moving institutions forward, this normalising of lateral and responsive thinking and activities aids in the promotion of an institution’s objective and enduring message.

This paper presents a cycle of normalisation. However, this initially prescribes towards an enterprising college or university’s unique standing, focus, and short, medium, or longer term aspiration. This model, along with its explanation enclosed within the appendix, underline further crucial aspects of autonomy, problem solving, and responsibility. Within education, these skills and attributes are both key and desired from the business world.

Further avenues concerning potentially-immediate institutional change or gradual re-development, with regards to entrepreneurship education more broadly, such as collaboration focussing on teaching practices or research projects, should be desired and incorporated into phased frameworks of realisation and normalisation such as Figure 2. These shared ventures evolve the various types of formative and summative assessment, as well as developing stronger, entrepreneurially-equipped ecosystems comprising of current students, alumni, business partners, and seasoned entrepreneurs.

The phased conceptualisation showcased above, when acknowledging and respecting the many stakeholders such as those mentioned, underpins new approaches, rhetoric, and understandings of enterprise, entrepreneurship, and anticipated entrepreneurial behaviour. The experiences of these influential individuals and groups, which directly impact and surround the educational context are vital, and bridge practical learning with industry. This attentiveness is important, in reinvigorating tired courses, dated programmes, and poorly resourced or ineffective teaching teams.

10. Future Research

Presenting its unique model of phased normalisation, this paper encourages application of this novel conceptualisation towards understanding new or developing educational contexts for enterprising education. In addition, it can also lead to a prescription of where in which potential aspects of resource, approach, enterprising rhetoric, or levels of relationship require due attention and strengthening. The findings from the paper, along with the subsequent discussion of the phased model (Table 1), allows for valuable research to be undertaken with many methods of empirical investigation to be utilised.

This may include more innovative forms of educational research, including role and scenario setting within the given environment(s), longitudinal field research over a lengthy period of time, environmental scanning and stakeholder analysis towards resource acquisition and maximisation, as well as other, more typical methods belonging to both quantitative and qualitative research strategy domains such as individual or group-based enquiry.

References


## Appendix

### Table 1. Phased Normalisation by Categorised Skillset

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<tr>
<td><strong>Personal</strong></td>
<td>Programme</td>
<td>Student Autonomy &amp; Empowerment</td>
<td>Encouraging &amp; Skill-centric Opportunity</td>
<td>Desired Industry Experience</td>
<td>(Scuotto and Murray, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Responsibility &amp; Categorised Skill Sets</td>
<td>Programme Suitability &amp; Motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal</strong></td>
<td>Cultural Uniqueness, Purpose &amp; Belonging</td>
<td>Participatory Learning ‘Events’</td>
<td>Inclusivity of People, Ideas &amp; Perspectives</td>
<td>Learning by Doing</td>
<td>(Crammond, 2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional</strong></td>
<td>Affirming Institutional USP</td>
<td>Purposive Capacity &amp; Capability</td>
<td>Capturing Ideas &amp; Directing Beneficial Entities</td>
<td>Strengthening Areas of Excellence</td>
<td>(Crammond et al., 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enterprising</strong></td>
<td>Productive Practical, Embedding &amp; Entrenching</td>
<td>Expression &amp; Value-creative</td>
<td>Cross-School / Industry Nexus</td>
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