Preface: entrepreneurship education – what is it we need to know?

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Welcome to Volume IV of the *Annals of Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy* published in partnership between the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship and Edward Elgar Publishing. As noted in the preface of Volume III, the state of the art and science of entrepreneurship education is good. Yet, despite the continued advances in content, delivery, evaluation, review, and feedback developed, there remains work to be done. This is not unexpected. After all, we teach ideation, innovation, experimentation, design thinking, customer discovery, and more, so our knowledge base continues to evolve and develop as do the needs of our students, and thus so too must our approach to entrepreneurship education itself. If nothing else became apparent in the year leading up to the release of Volume IV, it is the realization that as educators we need to be prepared to adapt rapidly to changing, and often complex, conditions that require us to be innovative in our pedagogical approaches.

A case in point is the value of experiential learning in entrepreneurship education. Morris and Liguori (2016) note, “a large percentage (perhaps as much as 60 percent) of the [entrepreneurship] education program should center on experiential learning.” In this sense, the majority of the contemporary entrepreneurship education is prescribed as being experiential in nature, a defining characteristic most model programs across the globe embrace and advertise to prospective students. The prevalence of experiential learning in entrepreneurship education is widespread and evidenced by the majority of content published in the previous three volumes (e.g., Choi, 2014; Neck, Greene, & Brush, 2014; Schindehutte & Morris, 2016; Morland & Thompson, 2016). It is also a prevalent theme in much of the contemporary entrepreneurship research in the field (e.g., Heriot, Cook, Matthews, & Simpson, 2007; Neck & Greene, 2011; Morris, Kuratko, & Cornwall, 2013; Vanevenhoven & Liguori, 2013).

Yet, despite the proliferation of “experiential learning” in entrepreneurship education, a review of the tools available to entrepreneurship educators reveals

that nearly all of the “experiential learning” activities, assignments, role-plays, and exercises are designed for face-to-face instruction. In short, as entrepreneurship educators we have honed our craft for primarily in-person environments. While the advent of the Internet and its adaptation in higher education in general and entrepreneurship education in particular has and continues to be impactful (Pittinsky, 2003), by and large entrepreneurship educators tend to use it as a supplement or complement to face-to-face content delivery rather than more widely embracing it as a more *complete* mode of delivery. While this is certainly not true in the absolute sense (e.g., there are 100 percent online entrepreneurship and other courses), it is true for the majority of courses and the majority of entrepreneurship degree programs.

Like most things, the delivery mode was not a challenge or problem for the majority of educators, especially given that in general, we do not typically fix what does not appear to be broken. The spring 2020 semester, however, witnessed an unprecedented change. It began much like every prior semester for the past few decades. Students filled classrooms, engaged in classroom exercises, field case exercises, and started attending startup events in local, regional, national, and international venues. As the semester progressed, students continued to engage in a plethora of experiential learning approaches offered through their programs (exercises, community events, competitions, internships, apprenticeships, and more).

Then the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed everything, first in the short term and likely in the long term as well (Liguori & Winkler, 2020). As the preface to Volume IV goes to press, we are looking at the conclusion of a semester which started very typically and abruptly became 100 percent virtual. It was at this point the realization set in that most of our high-impact and experiential learning approaches and opportunities required face-to-face interaction for delivery. Moreover, the awareness emerged that very little research on, and pedagogical approaches for, experiential learning beyond face to face have been developed.

Reflecting back, the last ten weeks have been a period of learning, adapting, satisficing, salvaging, and triaging the semester. Very little time was available for developing new and impactful online learning tools and approaches; instead, best-case scenario was the mindset “how can I adapt this face-to-face activity to fit an online environment?” As a new term dawns, we find ourselves in an evolving world of face-to-face, hybrid, synchronous, and asynchronous teaching and learning environments, tools, and techniques. In short, we exist in an ever evolving complex system, with external factors that impact the “what” and the “how” of entrepreneurship education. Looking forward, we must continue to address and consider three fundamental questions: (1) what is it we need to know, (2) why is it important to know, and (3) how are we going to know it?

WHAT IS IT WE NEED TO KNOW?

Today, new challenges arise as we still struggle with the core definition of entrepreneurship and the hijacking of the discipline by just about everyone. In the preface of Volume III, it is noted:

I know of no other academic (or non-academic for that matter) discipline that has allowed itself to be so abused and ultimately hijacked by others when it comes to what that discipline actually is. As a result, the word “entrepreneurship” continuously suffers a definitional crisis, which in turn, systematically obscures the core element of entrepreneurship education, and all that it encompasses. (Matthews, 2018, p. xvii)

This begs the question, as an academic discipline and practice, what is it that is important to know? Interestingly, it is not about the ever expanding entrepreneurship literature, per se, that has evolved over multiple decades. Too often, researchers note the goal of their work is “to advance the literature.” Not surprising given the often misguided notion that published work is the best measure and subsequently our goal, rather than advancing knowledge. In reality, it is about advancing what we know or, more precisely, what we don’t know. The literature exists to inform our quest for knowledge, not the other way around. What are the compelling questions surrounding what we need to know to advance both the theory and practice of entrepreneurship and subsequently entrepreneurship education?

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW?

Which brings us to the second question, “Why is it important to know?” Simply, the discipline of entrepreneurship itself, and subsequently entrepreneurship education, cannot advance without identifying why we need to know something. Are we asking the important questions and why each is important? Or are we just going with the flow? Why is it important to know a core definition of entrepreneurship? Why is it important to know how ventures differ in terms of growth aspirations? Why is it important to know how artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, the Internet of Things, the Industrial Internet of Things, venture funding, and more will impact entrepreneurship and, subsequently, entrepreneurship education? At what point do we see the relevance of theory and the intersection with practice? That the pedagogy of entrepreneurship education was caught so flat-footed by the seismic shift from face-to-face to all online instruction is a clarion call to focus on these first two questions more expansively. It is not just about the literature. What is it we need to know and why is it important to know it?

HOW ARE WE GOING TO KNOW IT?

Given the pursuit of knowledge and its importance, how are we going to know what it is we need to know? That is, how do we know something? How is it measured? What are the standards by which an assessment is made? Which brings us squarely into the realm of entrepreneurship education. As a discipline, what topics are important to be covered? Which are the best pedagogies to use in that pursuit? What metrics are best to use in given circumstances? Where are “one-size-fits-all” tools appropriate and where do we need highly customizable frames to illuminate the content of entrepreneurship?

As noted in Volume III, “as a discipline, we need to integrate our research more closely with entrepreneurship education. That is, we need to engage more in the scholarship of entrepreneurship education” (Matthews, 2018, p. xxi). It has, is, and continues to challenge us entrepreneurship educators. Are you up for the challenge?

IN THIS VOLUME

Even a cursory read of Volume IV reveals that the authors in this volume have risen to the challenge of advancing entrepreneurship education on multiple fronts. Moreover, Volume IV comes out at a time when the world is dealing with the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic and all the challenges it has presented to every occupation and lifestyle. While only a few articles in this volume touch directly on the impact of the pandemic, its aftershock will continue to play a role in entrepreneurship education for some time to come. Time-tested and timely topics from brainstorming to the role of experiential learning to gender and equity inclusion evolve in and out of the classroom. The challenges of undergraduate and graduate entrepreneurship education follow similar yet divergent paths. From classroom-tested practices, five master entrepreneurship educators (viz., Dan Cohen, Paul Jones, Jerry Katz, Jeff Pollack, and Rebecca White, Chapter 1) share key insights. In addition, five model university programs (viz., Florida State University, Georgetown University, Iona College, Millikin University, and University of Missouri – Kansas City) highlight the ever evolving landscape of entrepreneurship education from programmatic and ecosystem perspectives. Finally, an incredibly impressive collection of thought leaders shares a variety of best practices, including a piece on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on small businesses. In the chapters ahead, you will be enlightened and challenged in thought and practice. Here is just a sampling of the contributors’ individual and collective insight and wisdom.

When it comes to new venture creation, brainstorming is a valuable technique for ideation both in the classroom and practice. In Chapter 4, Zane and

Zimbroff introduce various ways that brainstorming and other ideation techniques can be applied in the classroom to facilitate entrepreneurship education. Three exercise examples show how to introduce brainstorming in the classroom and provide insights into content, process, and outcomes from time well spent working with entrepreneurship students. More than just a step-by-step guide, the authors share key insights into the value added for the students, instructor, and ultimately, the startup experience.

In Chapter 13, Sara Cochran presents a compelling thesis on the experiences of women in entrepreneurship education. It is a complex environment, but Cochran frames the essential question around which to pursue this well-crafted qualitative study: *What role does gender play in the academic experience of women participating in an entrepreneurship program?* The results of her work are a must-read as we continue to move forward to develop an entrepreneurship education environment that is inclusive and diverse and ultimately contributes to a better world.

In universities and colleges around the world, entrepreneurship education continues to evolve both within business schools as well as across campuses. Katarina Ellborg takes a close look at the role and use of visual artifacts from a student-centered perspective. In Chapter 6, Ellborg takes a deep dive into the theory and practice, shedding light on how visual artifacts play a role in didactic analysis in order to approach students' contemporary meaning of entrepreneurship in the beginning of the learning process.

MBA programs across the country strive to remain current, identify meaningful curricula for the future, and translate theory into practice. At the same time, companies across the industrial and commercial spectrum struggle to avoid complacency, search for ways to be creative and innovative, and face increasing pressure from a changing competitive landscape. It is this perfect storm that propels Birton Cowden, Mark Hiatt, James Swaim, and Gregory Quinet to explore the intersection of the past, present, and future of MBA core curricula and the role of managerial mindset versus an entrepreneurial mindset. Using effectuation as a focal point, Chapter 5 outlines the need and process for making MBA education in general and the core curriculum valuable into the twenty-first century.

In Chapter 22, Shelby Solomon and Otis Solomon, Jr. tackle a very timely and important question in our classrooms today. How do we deal with classroom diversity in our pursuit of entrepreneurship education? They note that to date many routine attempts at encouraging diversity are based upon student majors or some other readily observable difference. They outline an interesting perspective on how to respect individual autonomy while encouraging diversity via a game based on MTV's reality series "Are You the One." The game encourages diversity through the use of group incentives, thereby preserving autonomy and inspiring social exploration.

The future of entrepreneurship education relies on many factors, and perhaps chief among them is preparing doctoral qualified scholars to rise to the challenge of pursuing both theory and practice. In Chapter 2, James Fiet explores the development of theory and provides a keen insight into the often little understood world of the state of the art of doctoral-level entrepreneurship education. He notes that although “doctoral programs vary in length from three to as many as five years and more, this short, intensive period of study has a much larger, ongoing influence on a scholar’s career.” The impact of blending and balancing the ever evolving landscape of theory and practice for these future scholars cannot be overstated, yet is often underestimated. A must-read for faculty engaged in mentoring, coaching, and preparing the next generation of entrepreneurship scholars.

“Philanthropy is almost the only virtue which is sufficiently appreciated by mankind” (Henry David Thoreau). There is no stronger connection between the success of entrepreneurs and their willingness to give back than the foundation of philanthropy in the United States. While not totally unique to America, charitable giving is a potent element for positive change in the world of entrepreneurship moving forward. In Chapter 9, Deborah Hoover provides a comprehensive overview of the role of philanthropy in identifying, initiating, developing, and growing entrepreneurship ecosystems in both community and university settings. Skillfully drawing out examples of philanthropic development from the past and present, she gives the reader a full view into the future of the transformative role of philanthropy across multiple constituencies. “If we don’t transform the world, who will? If not now, when?” (Anonymous).

“We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape up” (Winston Churchill). As the field of entrepreneurship continues to gain momentum into the twenty-first century, it is inevitable that we more fully consider how we shape it and it shapes us. Luke Pittaway builds an intriguing case in Chapter 3 that explores the role and impact of universities building new infrastructure for entrepreneurship and innovation activities. He does a deep dive into the extant literature to reveal the extent to which the role of physical infrastructure influences the entrepreneurship and innovation educational process. Effectively using multiple case studies of universities that have built new space, “the critical parameters that enable creativity and innovative behavior in on-campus entrepreneurship education spaces” are explored, analyzed, and discussed.

Of course, this is just a sampling of the many thought-provoking insights offered in this volume for your consideration, debate, use, and more. The chapters which follow contain a compendium of best practices, ideas, insights, and more from an incredibly diverse group of thought leaders from around the world. Read it from cover to cover or pick and choose a chapter here or there. Either way, you will not be disappointed. Enjoy!

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