

# The Determination of the Teaching Methodology of Entrepreneurship as Established by the Underlying Philosophy of Pragmatism

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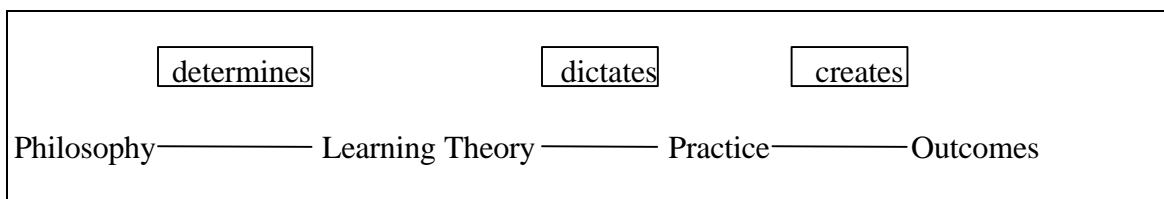
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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the question of “How to teach entrepreneurship” by establishing a relevant philosophy, identifying a delivery system, and identifying four specific learning outcomes. The thesis of this study was tested through focus group methodology with students from an entrepreneurship program where the learning outcomes of Social Learning Theory are also the objectives of the program. The focus group discussions were established to determine if the students experienced the same learning outcomes as the theory. The paper concludes by suggesting that entrepreneurship can be taught through utilising Social Learning Theory as grounded in the philosophy of pragmatism.

## Introduction

Leadership, innovation and culture are issues central to entrepreneurship. These enigmatic issues relate to/with a number of other issues derived from opportunity, serendipity, and vision. Therefore, the question to answer is not if entrepreneurship can be taught, but rather, how entrepreneurship is to be taught. Establishing a method of teaching entrepreneurship, requires an initial step of identifying the basic philosophy underlying the subject. The philosophy establishes the basis upon which any learning theory is derived. The selected learning theory, in conjunction with the underlying philosophical parameters, dictates the method of delivery and creates thereby, the desired learning outcomes as illustrated in Figure 1 below.



## Figure 1. The Process of Learning

Three primary philosophical parameters remain consistent throughout the above model, the view of the learner, the role of the teacher, and the type of learning.

This paper is divided into three primary sections. The first section examines pragmatism as an underlying philosophy of entrepreneurship. The second section examines Social Learning Theory as a learning theory based on pragmatism. The final section of this paper describes the results of a series of focus group discussions designed to establish whether or not the outcomes of students in an entrepreneurship program have supported the primary hypothesis of this paper.

### **The Philosophy**

Entrepreneurship, according to Bygrave (1989), has borrowed its research methodology from physics and mathematics as well as from other fields of academic enquiry. Indicating that entrepreneurship is without its own philosophical identity with which to determine the methods and parameters of, not only research but also learning.

Bygrave (1989) describes the field of entrepreneurship as, "...a process of *becoming* and not a state of *being*". According to Morris and Pai (1976), the concept of *becoming* is central to the philosophy of pragmatism. Pragmatic *becoming* is referred to as the continuous evolutionary process of revising and reconstructing experiences (Morris and Pai 1976). Additionally, Schumpeter (1943) provides additional support by stating, "This kind of activity [entrepreneurial] is primarily responsible for recurrent 'prosperities' that revolutionise the economic organism and the recurrent 'recessions' that are due to the disequilibrating impact of the new products or methods (p.132)." The terms "recurrent" and "disequilibrating" not only imply the underlying dynamic nature of entrepreneurship, but they also suggest that the entrepreneur and thus the entrepreneurial community undergo a continuous process of revising and restructuring experiences in order to combat the mitigating circumstances created by the dynamic nature of the economic environment. As suggested by Bygrave (1989) and Schumpeter (1943), the field of entrepreneurship continuously revises and reconstructs the experiences of the entrepreneurs. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider pragmatism a relevant philosophical basis for entrepreneurship.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Since the hypothesis of this paper focuses on the issue of teaching entrepreneurship, then it is necessary to identify a learning theory that is determined by and remains consistent with the parameters of pragmatism. The three primary philosophical parameters, the view of the learner, the role of the teacher, and the type of learning, determine the learning theory.

Although, the nature of the role of the pragmatic teacher is the same in nature as that of the learner, the pragmatic teacher is the facilitator/director of the *becoming* of the learner. The pragmatic teacher facilitates the experiences of the learner (Morris and Pai, 1976). Likewise, the learner facilitates the experiences of the teacher. Therefore, the learner and the teacher facilitate experiences for one another and are said to be co-investigators or co-learners in the field of entrepreneurship. Being the facilitator of the learner, the teacher has the opportunity to facilitate the learning by continuously introducing new experiences and thus the evolution of the truths and values of the next generation of entrepreneurs. The type of learning is therefore experientially based and continuous, thus, the learner is continuously revising and reconstructing experiences.

Social Learning Theory according to Bandura (1977), proposes that learning occurs as a result of the learner observing the behaviors of others within a specified social context. Thereby, implying that in order for the learner to learn from the experiences of others, the learner must therefore, revise and reconstruct these observed experiences as they apply to the learner. Since this revising and reconstructing occur continuously, then Social Learning Theory is a logical progression from the philosophy of pragmatism.

The theory continues, by identifying that the learner is engaged in the social context as a “participating observer”. Thereby, the learner’s self-belief to perform or replicate specific tasks is influenced by the successful social behaviors and reinforcements that the role model [the entrepreneur] experienced within the observed social context (Bandura, 1977; Betz & Hackett, 1981; and Krumboltz et al. 1976). The learner’s self-belief is referred to as self-efficacy. According to Bandura, (1982) and Wood & Bandura (1989), self-efficacy is intensified in the learner through any of four learning processes (listed from strongest influence to weakest): 1) sequential building of repeated successful performances; 2) the use of modeling through case studies and live role models; 3) feedback resulting from class discussions and specific feedback related to a specific performance; 4) self-assessment of capabilities through comparison of self to peers (Boyd and Vozikis 1994).

The process of case study analysis and the use of Pracademics (entrepreneurs that teach) provides the opportunity for learners to strengthen their self-efficacy in each of the four learning processes. For example, as a result of fully preparing the case, the learner experiences the process that was used by the entrepreneur. The preparation of the case is further reinforced by classroom discussion providing the student with performance specific feedback. The class discussion further causes the student to self-assess their performance by comparing their performance to their classmates’ performance. Finally, the self-assessed conclusion determines whether or not they have the capabilities necessary to compete with the other students. These four processes of self-efficacy strengthening can also be the outcomes that are created by the use of case study analysis and Pracademics.

## **Focus Group Study**

This final section describes the results of a series of focus group discussions designed to establish whether or not the students' self-assessed outcomes have supported the singular hypothesis of this paper. If these outcomes are indeed the outcomes from a case study and role model driven program, then the learning theory can be said to be consistent with the underlying philosophy of pragmatism and the hypothesis proved.

The two groups of students were composed of five students from each of the past and present classes from the MSc in Entrepreneurship program at Glasgow Caledonian University. One group consisted of students approximately at one third of the program. The second group of students consisted of those students that had completed the MSc program. Both groups were of varying ages, work experience, and gender.

The MSc program in entrepreneurship at Glasgow Caledonian University is focused on delivering its content through lectures in theory and case studies delivered by academics and practicing entrepreneurs (Pracademics) as primary illustrations of "real world" applications of theory.

The sampling technique is referred to as judgmental, wherein a researcher, knowledgeable of the project, requested the students to volunteer for the study. Both groups of students were ensured that their responses would, in no manner, effect their grades or future relationship with the faculty of the MSc. program. Furthermore, the students were advised that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous.

The students were requested to write their responses on a contextual guideline questionnaire while their discussion took place. The questionnaire was open ended and consisted of four questions focusing on the learning processes as established by Boyd and Vozikis (1994), (see Table A) below.

The purpose of the contextual guideline questionnaire was to maintain consistency between groups, reduce the role of the facilitator, stimulate discussion between the group participants, and to have a written record of the students comments, since no audio nor video recording was utilised. The researcher, who had no grading authority, facilitated the focus group discussions to maintain consistency between groups.

**Table A      Focus Group Contextual Guidelines**

**Instructions**

Normally, during a focus group discussion there is an audio or video recording of the discussion, however in this case I have asked you to write your answers instead. Your answers will remain confidential and anonymous. After the data has been processed, the original completed questionnaire will be destroyed.

Please write your answers in the spaces provide below each question. If you need more room then use the back and identify which question you are answering. Thank you for taking the time to help me with this research and to help improve the program.

**Questions**

1. Would you describe your performance in the program as a series of performances each building on the success of the previous performance? (Please explain your answer).
2. How did the live and case study entrepreneurs effect you?
3. What form did your performance specific feedback take?
4. At any time during the program did you compare your abilities to your fellow student? What were the circumstances? (List a maximum of two.)

**Summary Results**

The results from the two focus groups are summarized below by group and by question

**Group (A)**    One third completed programme.

*Question One:* Only one of the respondents considered their learning performances as building on previous successes. Even though, the majority of the respondents considered their learning experiences within the program as successful, they still felt that their experiences were disjointed and therefore, did not build on their previous performances. The responses, therefore, indicate that the learning experiences were not a sequential series of successful performances.

*Question Two:* Generally, the respondents agreed that the practicing entrepreneurs added motivation and a source of reality to the course work. With regard to case studies, the respondents felt that in some instances the case studies were effective to their understanding of decision making processes. Therefore, the responses appear varied, but indicated that the case studies and practicing entrepreneurs did provide reinforcement and motivation.

*Question Three:* Feedback, according to the respondents, took two forms, formal and informal. Formal feedback refers to grades and verbal feedback from faculty and staff. The second form of feedback was informal in nature and refers to the feedback provided by peers. Formal feedback was not possible until the end of semester due to the academic assessment of the university. However, according to the participants, peer or informal feedback was invaluable. It provided the participants with the measure of progress and reinforcement.

*Question Four:* The consensus opinion of the participants of this focus group identified that the students compared their abilities and attitudes with one another almost on a continuous basis. More specifically, self-assessment provided a performance related benchmark that students used to measure their standing in comparison with their peers.

In summary, the respondents were supportive of all of the outcomes except the first, wherein the respondents felt that the experiences were disjointed and therefore not building on the success of the previous experience. The responses to the second question revealed the respondents to have a mixed appreciation for the effects of case studies and practicing entrepreneurs. The responses to the third question identified the limited nature of formal feedback and the reinforcing nature of peer feedback. Further reinforcement was derived from the competition that developed between students in the program and manifested itself as a personal comparative self-assessment.

#### **Group (B)** - Completed Full programme

*Question One:* The majority of the respondents generally agreed that the program provided a series of opportunities in which the student may create a succession of successful experiences. However, the same majority further acknowledged that their experiences became, at times, disjointed and unrelated.

*Question Two:* The responses acknowledged the inspirational and reinforcing effects that the practicing entrepreneurs provided to the students. The case studies received overall praise at the opportunities they provided by allowing the student to enter a synthetic entrepreneurial environment apart from the classroom. Overall, the respondents acknowledged the value and contributions to the learning process that case studies and practicing entrepreneurs provided.

*Question Three:* The third question requested the students to identify the performance specific feedback. The general consensus identified the most effective

feedback came from their peers. Due to the academic structure, formal feedback was not possible until the end of semester.

*Question Four:* This question requested the students to identify if and when they compared their abilities to their fellow students. The unanimous answer was they had made this comparative self-assessment. Therefore, the students found the self-assessment a form of reinforcement and feedback.

In summary, the majority of the respondents generally agreed that the program provided a series of opportunities in which the student may create a succession of successful experiences. However, the respondents also identified that their experiences were disjointed and inconsistent. The responses to question two acknowledged the value and contributions that case studies and practicing entrepreneurs provided to the learning process. In responding to question three, the students identified that informal feedback provided a way to measure their progress. However, they were also critical over the lack of formal reinforcement. The final question found self-assessment to be a form of reinforcement and feedback for the students.

## **Results Summary**

Each of the groups' responses is generalised and combined to form a comparison of the group results on a question by question basis.

*Question One:* Both groups identified the disjointed nature of their experiences however, both groups, one stronger than the other, suggested that their experiences were not a series of sequentially successful experiences.

*Question Two:* Both groups agree that case studies and practicing entrepreneurs provided motivation as well as the acquisition of decision processes.

*Question Three:* Both groups agreed to the lack of formal feedback. However, both groups appreciated the reinforcing effects of peer and informal feedback.

*Question Four:* Both groups continuously compared their abilities and capabilities with their peers. Additionally, both groups recognized the reinforcing effects of self-assessment.

It appears that only three of the four learning outcomes were supported by both groups. The first learning outcome was not recognized by both groups as occurring. However, both groups contained a minority response, indicating that their learning experiences had consisted of a series of sequential successful experiences. Question one was the only question with a differing set of responses.

## Preliminary Results

Although a preliminary study, sufficient rationale and evidence has been presented to draw some initial and tentative conclusions, namely the philosophy of pragmatism, particularly with its concept of *becoming* supports the use of Social Learning Theory and the resultant four learning outcomes. In addition to the philosophical identification of Social Learning Theory, the preliminary focus group data appears to support, that the learning outcomes, as derived from Social Learning Theory are the learning outcomes as experienced by the participants of the study. Therefore Social Learning Theory is a learning theory through which Entrepreneurship can be taught.

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