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Generating entrepreneurship and new learning environments from students' free-time activities and hobbies

ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of focus-group interviews carried out among a group of University of Applied Sciences students taking part in pre-incubator programmes. We explore pre-incubator students' growth to entrepreneurship by examining what kinds of element influence in their process of becoming entrepreneurs. The practical aim of the study is to find answers of how to renew our entrepreneurial training programmes so that they would better meet the needs of students at Universities of Applied Sciences. Entrepreneurship in pre-incubation students is the results of a triangulation process of life experiences such as free-time activities and hobbies, entrepreneurship education, and socialisation within one's family. Counselling, coaching and mentoring are the catalysts in this process of growth towards entrepreneurship. Our study strengthens the view point that entrepreneurship education and training programmes should be concrete and practical. Students should have the possibility to tailor their studies individually and to create their own learning environment – this fact is even more important among those students who already possess a set of characteristics known as entrepreneurial spirit.

Key words: *Entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education, growth to entrepreneurship, pre-incubator, hobby*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The future economic wellbeing and economic growth points to a greater need for more entrepreneurial activity as Europe is ageing within the next decade and the family firms will be facing the inevitable business transfers from one generation to another. Like many other European countries, also the Finnish institutes of higher education have become more active in promoting entrepreneurship: Enterprise education has been included to degree programmes, connections with the working life have been increased and pre-incubators have been developed to support pre-company formation periods. (Rajaniemi, Niinikoski and Kokko 2005, 4.) However, despite the increasing number of activities and courses in entrepreneurship education and training, surprisingly few students are interested in entrepreneurship studies and even fewer are interested in actually becoming entrepreneurs. For instance, Pihkala (2008) points out that 2.2 per cent of university graduates and 2.7 per cent of graduates from Universities of Applied Sciences chose self-employment after studies. His longitudinal research of two Universities of Applied Sciences also indicated that it is difficult to influence in students' entrepreneurial intentions during their studies.

Becoming an entrepreneur, however, is a long process, and the goal of education is not only to rush students into becoming entrepreneurs, but rather to provide them with tools that enable realistic student self-evaluations even several years after graduation (Römer-Paakkanen 2006, 196.) It is argued that a prerequisite for stimulating and enhancing entrepreneurial spirits of young people is that we must better understand the way they think and how they go about choosing a career (Henderson & Robertson 2000; Römer-Paakkanen and Rauhala 2007). Adopting entrepreneurship as a career option does not depend solely on individual's knowledge of the field, but also on attitudes and the willingness in adopting it as a way of life. Kyrö and Carrier (2005) argue that this perspective assumes breaking the traditional school boundaries and considering learning as a process that takes place everywhere, at home, free time activities and hobbies.

This claim follows the European Commission's (2000) definition of purposeful learning activity. It divides learning into three basic categories. *Formal learning* that leads to a certification and is typically provided by an educational or training institution. *Non-formal learning*, not provided by an educational or training institution, but from a learner's perspective is a structured and intentional process. *Informal learning* is a consequence of daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. Informal learning may be intentional, but in most cases is not.

According to the European Commission (2006, 5) entrepreneurship competence is developed in both formal and non-formal settings (e.g. youth work and various forms of participation in a society). Tools for recognising and validating entrepreneurship-related skills, acquired in non-formal learning, should be further developed. However, we suggest that informal learning is also essential in understanding the way youngsters think and choose a career. Thus learning is an in-

teractive process between formal, non-formal and informal learning in which students' ideas and actions are in focus. Entrepreneurship research on understanding this interplay is still rare. Our suggestion challenges higher education to design comprehensive and integrative curricula in entrepreneurship education. However, still many universities have their curriculum structures organized and communicated through a menu of courses defined, labelled, and organized by disciplines (Kickul and Fayolle 2007, 2–4). This poses considerable challenges to our educational system, and to the higher education in particular. Adopting this approach also influences the entrepreneurial teaching methods. (Heinonen and Akola 2007, 29). As Thompson (2006, 78) argues this means that there cannot be one-size-fits-all methods or training, but education should embrace talent spotting, advising, counselling, training, mentoring and coaching.

The European Commission's (2006, 10) definition of entrepreneurship encourages adopting this expanded idea of learning into entrepreneurship education. Thus, learning entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial behaviour means developing new ideas and actions in new pedagogical environments. Entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action, consisting of creativity, innovation, risk taking, and the ability to be able to plan and manage projects to achieve set objectives. This supports everyone in day-to-day life at home and in society, makes employees more aware of the context of their work and better prepared to be able to seize opportunities and provides a foundation for entrepreneurs establishing social or commercial activities.

The recent strategy of the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS) underlines these aspects and recommends encouraging entrepreneurship as a career option. Students should be encouraged to work with their plans of starting their own businesses by providing opportunities to try and test entrepreneurship in a pre-incubator or incubator programme. (ARENE 2006.)

The topic of our study is pre-incubator activities (in the UAS), and we aim at understanding the way youngsters think and how they go about choosing entrepreneurship as a career. The objective is thus to understand how the interplay between formal learning (studies in the UAS), non-formal and informal learning (in family and in hobbies) takes place in the pre-incubator processes in the UAS.

2. A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN HOME, SCHOOL AND OUTSIDE WORLD IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

There is a wide range of definitions of different types of education or learning but it is difficult to find one universal definition for research purposes. Boundaries between formal, non-formal, and informal learning can only be meaningfully drawn in relation to particular contexts and for par-

ticular purposes (Colley, Hodgkinson and Malcolm, 2003). As pointed out above, the European Commission has its own classification, but Straka (2004, 5), for instance, argues that it has no theoretical or methodological specifications on learning, pedagogy, and assessment. Colardy and Bjørnåvold (2004,71) support the formulation in which (a) formal stands for learning that occurs within an organised and structured context, (b) non-formal is learning embedded in planned activities that are not explicitly designated as learning, and (c) informal learning is the result of daily life activities related to work, family, or leisure. The greater conceptual clarification on learning is still missing because elements of both formal and informal learning are present in nearly all situations in which learning takes place. The most significant issue is not the boundaries between the different types of learning but the inter-relationships between dimensions of formality or informality in particular situations (Colley et al. 2003).

Consequently, it is even more difficult to find theories for understanding entrepreneurship education as the interplay between formal, non-formal and informal learning. Some ideas, however, can be found in family business research. Kirkwood (2007, 46) points out that family business research clearly indicates that parents who own businesses certainly play a role in their children's decision of becoming entrepreneurs. According to Erikson (2003) entrepreneurial learning develops and strengthens those competencies which originate from three sources: (1) *Mastery* – as we learn from our experiences, (2) *Observation* – we can learn from events (such as studied successes and failures of others, and in such cases these other entrepreneurs, who may always remain strangers, are acting as indirect mentors), and (3) *Socializing* – networking and learning directly from the experiences of others who may be acting as mentors or coaches.

Koiranen (2000, 156) suggests that the growth to entrepreneurship stems from a long process of learning in a range of environments (e.g. home and family background, school and the outside world). An entrepreneurial family background tends to influence attitudes positively and increase the potential of offspring adopting entrepreneurial behaviour. Similarly, if school and society as a whole encourage and support active and innovative behaviour of young people, it will, in turn, create space for entrepreneurship. Home, school and the outside world are clearly interrelated (Koiranen 2004.) These three environments (systems) can also be seen as an arena for the interplay between formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The growth to entrepreneurship begins at home during childhood. Becoming an entrepreneur depends on entrepreneurial spirit or drive, attitudes, skills and motivation. The entrepreneurial spirit, which points to pro-activeness, innovativeness, willingness to take risks and enlarge businesses (Chirico, 2007a, 58; Chirico, 2007b, 142), arises from positive self-esteem and entrepreneurial attitudes. Moreover, the preference for innovation, non-conformity, proactive disposition, self-efficacy, and achievement motivation promote entrepreneurial behaviour (Florin, Karri and Rossiter 2007).

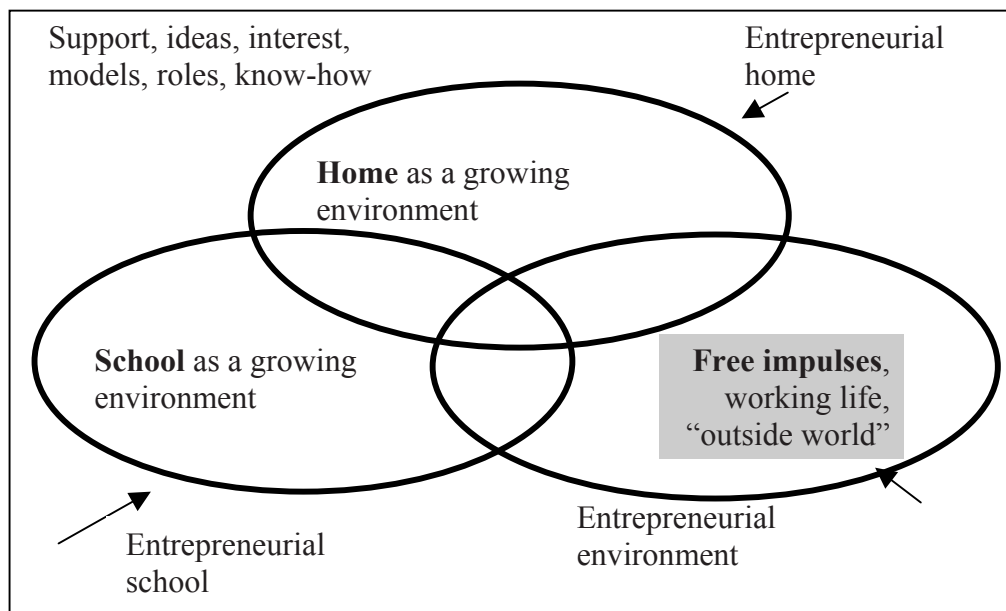


FIGURE 1. Different environments (or systems) fostering entrepreneurial spirit (adapted from Koiranen 2004).

In the family systems theory, the core idea is a family as a whole and unique unit with its own structure, beliefs and patterns of relating (Whiteside, Aronoff and Ward 1993, 17). Household or family functions are sets of everyday activities essential to the survival and enhancement of the family group. They include: (1) procreation, or bearing of children; (2) socialisation, or caring for and educating family members to function in the family and in other social systems; and (3) economic concerns, transforming energy-matter into activities that are useful to family members or to the larger society. (Paolucci *et al.* 1977, 136.) Parsons and Bales (1955, 16) claim that the two basic family functions are the primary socialisation of children, and the stabilisation of adult personalities in the society. The term *family system* in our study refers to business family backgrounds and their connection with the process of becoming an entrepreneur. In business families the children grow up with parents who have accepted an entrepreneurial way of life and it may reflect to the future career options of the offspring. According to Dyer (1994, 8), a comprehensive theory of entrepreneurial careers should contain the following four “sub-theories”: Career choice, career socialisation, career orientation and career progression. A theory of entrepreneurial careers should focus on understanding how entrepreneurs’ roles (i.e. business, family and personal) change over time and over the course of careers. These different roles can cause problems and conflicts over time.

The *educational systems* in our study refer to the UAS studies and pre-incubator programmes. According to Rajaniemi et al. (2005, 4), pre-incubators in higher education are understood as a part of the learning processes: Pre-incubators not only prepare students to start businesses in incubation but also assist in developing business ideas while still studying. Thus, students are able to include their entrepreneurial activities in their degrees. Pre-incubation is as a wider process of business development, supporting activities in higher education environment. Pre-incubation activities are incorporated in other learning activities so that the simultaneous completion of studies and the development of a business idea are made possible (Saurio 2003, 99).

In our study, experiences in *informal and non-formal systems* point to free time activities and hobbies, i.e. activities done when not working or studying. Hobbies are practiced for interest and enjoyment, rather than for a financial reward. Engaging in a hobby can lead to acquiring substantial skills, knowledge, and experiences. The aim is personal fulfilment. (Farflex.)

Home, school and free time activities are the core components that influence students' pre-understanding as they start their entrepreneurship studies and training at the UAS. Theoretical studies and practical exercises with teachers, entrepreneurs and other experts form a process in which their understanding increases. The objective of the training process is a deep understanding of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon. This process can lead to internal entrepreneurship, external entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial orientation. (Römer-Paakkanen 2001.)

We are interested in the interplay between formal, non-formal and informal learning in the pre-incubator context in the UAS. The aim is to understand *how the interplay between family backgrounds, free-time activities and hobbies, and education influence pre-incubator students' growth to entrepreneurship*. This research problem consists of three sub-questions:

- 1) What is the influence of family (family environment) background?
- 2) What is the influence of free-time activities and hobbies (non-formal and informal environment)?
- 3) What is the influence of education and studies (formal environment)?

Our objective is look into this interplay between the environments and to explore qualitatively how the interplay is appraised and shaped on the basis of the experiences of our informants.

3. METHODOLOGY

To study the UAS pre-incubator students' growth to entrepreneurship we conducted a qualitative research. The data were collected by both focus-group interviews and personal discussions with the students taking part in the pre-incubator programme. According to Flick (1998, 115), a focus-group interview is an interview with a small group of people (six to eight) on a specific topic,

typically lasting for one and a half to two hours. Focus-groups are useful when the research topic is new or when the aim is to find out new ideas. Pihkala (2008, 61), using focus-group interviews in his doctoral dissertation, found the method suitable for studying students' entrepreneurial intentions during their Polytechnic (UAS) education.

In addition to focus-group interviews and discussions, we also practiced *observational field-work* as we followed our informants' study processes and work on their business ideas for more than a year. According to Hughes (2002, 139), field work refers to observation of people *in situ*, finding them where they are, staying with them in some role which, while acceptable to them, will allow both intimate observation of certain parts of their behaviours.

The physical context of this study is the HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences (hereafter HH) business programmes. An enquiry, made for 8,421 HH students, shows that there is a great potential of entrepreneurs among the students: Altogether more than 700 students were interested in entrepreneurship, 51 had already started their own businesses, 114 would like to do so during their studies, and 229 come from business families (Toivola, 2008).

The objective of HH pre-incubator is to assess the students' possibilities and desire to become entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship can be full-time or part-time, or just one stage in life. Not everybody taking part in the pre-incubator is expected to become an entrepreneur, as some students may conclude that they could start their own businesses after getting more work experience. The pre-incubator includes a variety of different kinds of exercises, the largest of which is the formulation of a business plan. Guest lecturers and entrepreneurs play an important role in the programme.

Our seven informants, of which five were female and two male, are a special group of HH students, all studying business, taking part in the pre-incubator, had a business family background and wanted to create their own businesses. As pre-incubator students, they were well acquainted with searching for business opportunities, researching the market potential of their business ideas and products and learning about the process of business building. Even though all our informants have entrepreneurial backgrounds they are not (for the time being) planning to continue their family businesses. The students had written a business plan on the basis of their special interest area or on the basis of their hobby and three of them had already founded their own businesses. One student was already earning living from her own business. In addition, all informants were writing their theses on entrepreneurship. They were developing business ideas building on their special interest areas or hobbies: Chinese board games, dancing and cheerleaders, aquarium fishes, designing, and computer games. They can be called *student entrepreneurs* since they had set up or were planning to set up companies to be run alongside their studies (Van der Sijde 2006, 36). Some limitations exist due to our sample size (seven informants), but we wanted to highlight our informants' relevance to our research question. We chose those informants because they were interested in discussing the topic and developing the content of their studies.

The research approach is abductive which means that we move from the observed facts to generalizations. We observed our students, found interesting phenomena and also identified interesting theories that could be used describe them, conducted the focus-group interviews, interpreted the data and reflected it against our research questions and against the theories and previous literature. Using the abductive approach means that the goal is to explore the data, find out a phenomenon or pattern and suggest a claim or hypothesis.

After identifying the informants, we conceptualized the main research questions and designed the focus-group interview. In the interview we let the students discuss the topics and themes quite freely, mainly making sure that all the themes were covered but also letting the informants bring in their topics to the discussion. The students did not share their life stories with each other but they reflected on the most important reasons in their entrepreneurial processes and careers and considered the best educational ways for enhancing students to become entrepreneurs. They also gave feedback of both the studies they had chosen and of the mandatory courses. To obtain background information, we collected informants' personal information by personal discussions and through an e-mail survey after the focus-group interview.

Plenty of time was needed for conducting the interviews and analysing the qualitative data; the work consisted of planning and conducting the interviews, listening and transcribing the tapes, reading the transcripts and notes from the sessions, organizing and analyzing the data, and creating a summary of the findings. We had one student assistant, doing her thesis using the same data, who helped us with the transcriptions and analyzing the data.

As we listened to the tapes and read the transcripts, we were seeking for major quotes, key points, and themes that might emerge. We identified some themes in the discussions, and in addition to the topics that gave answers to our research questions, we focused on the question why some of the students are planning their own businesses on the basis of their hobby but not on the basis of their family businesses. In addition to the background information, we were interested in the students' motives to participate in entrepreneurial studies and the pre-incubator programmes, their perceptions on the teaching methods (e.g. applicability), as well as their learning processes.

We organized the data using the *conceptual ordering* method which means organizing the data into discrete categories according to their properties and dimensions and then using descriptions to elucidate those categories (Straus and Corbin 1998, 19). Dudley and Phillips (2008) suggest that when reviewing data researchers should also ask following questions: What was known and then confirmed or challenged by the focus group data? What was suspected and then confirmed or challenged by the focus group data? What was new that wasn't previously suspected? The categories that we used in analysis were: (a) Why the UAS, studies at the UAS, entrepreneur-

ship studies, pre-incubator programme; (b) family relations, family support; (c) other supporting people; (d) hobbies, activities and passions; (e) future plans.

4. RESULTS

After organizing the data, we interpreted the discussions, qualitatively analyzed the data against our research questions, and reflected the empirical material with our theoretic background and with other existing current literature on the topic. The descriptive quotations used in the analysis can be seen in Figure 2. The language of focus-group interviews and discussions was Finnish and the descriptive quotations that are used in this paper are translated to English by the researchers.

From the very beginning it became obvious that all three systems stemming from the theory can be identified in the discussions. However, rather than being separate systems, they were strongly linked to each other. The informal and non-formal systems i.e. the free-time activities and hobbies proved to be the core that were closely related to the other two systems i.e. to family and education, and it is not useful to examine them separately. For our informants the entrepreneurial career of creating their own businesses was a likely career choice: They chose business studies since they wanted to learn how to run a business, and they chose their pre-incubator studies as they wanted to develop their ideas further. They also reflected their ideas and decisions with their parents. The interplay between socialisation, experiences and education is presented in Figure 3.

We found that *one's growth to entrepreneurship could be understood as a triangulation process of socialisation, experiences and education*. This process develops in different environments or systems – in family (system), school (education system) and in free-time activities and hobbies (informal and non-formal systems). Counselling, coaching and mentoring form a supporting system, functioning as catalysts in the process. Counselling focuses on an individual, producing self-directive actions, and its aim is to highlight competent learning and self-management. Tunkkari-Eskelinen (2005, 20–21 and 199) argues that it is difficult to make clear distinctions between mentoring and coaching or parenting, but she, nevertheless, proposes that parenting should not be used as a synonym to mentoring. Mentoring means a one-to-one relationship established between a more experienced person and a less experienced one.

After introducing the triangulation process in Figure 3, we will briefly present the results divided according to our research questions and finally conclude the discussion in section 4.4.

<p align="center">Research problem in this paper:</p> <p align="center"><i>How the interplay between family background, free-time activities and hobbies, and education influences pre-incubator students' growth into entrepreneur?</i></p>		
<p align="center">Family system Main concepts Socialisation Family business Business family Mentoring</p>	<p align="center">Informal and non-formal systems Main concepts Free-time activities and hobbies Coaching</p>	<p align="center">Education system Main concepts Entrepreneurship education Entrepreneurship studies Pre-incubator Counselling</p>
<p><i>"I think that the conversations are most important. It is fine to have the possibility to tell my ideas to someone who understands entrepreneurship and knows my situation and doesn't leave me alone with my "silly" idea. I sell my idea to at least three family members allowing them to evaluate it."</i></p> <p><i>"I really need to do many things in my life"</i></p> <p><i>"It is true that my family members encourage me even though people say that entrepreneurship is not the way to become rich..."</i></p> <p><i>"... My father has always given me financial advice and he has also helped me financially."</i></p>	<p><i>"I have so much to do on different areas and it is very hard to make choices; the real difficulty is making choices."</i></p> <p><i>"I feel that to be active in my hobby means activity in other fields as well - like other hobbies, studies and working."</i></p> <p><i>"In the future I would like to have a job in which I can use the competencies that I have learned in my hobby and in pre-incubator. I wish for job in which creativity and self-realization are possible. I want to make my ideas come true."</i></p> <p><i>"... to take small steps..."</i></p> <p><i>"Would it not be fun if my hobby could be my profession?"</i></p> <p><i>"My hobby is my passion ... If I can make my living from it ... what could be better?"</i></p> <p><i>"...opportunity to show creativity and to do things by yourself"</i></p> <p><i>"... possibility of trying harder and thus increase persistence..."</i></p> <p><i>"...ability to organize, lead and learn responsibility..."</i></p>	<p><i>"The best teachers have had entrepreneurial habits and attitudes... they have some experience in working in SME's and also know what entrepreneurship is in the real life."</i></p> <p><i>"... learning by doing..."</i></p> <p><i>"... personal timing..."</i></p> <p><i>"...Different ways to carry out the studies and self-orientation..."</i></p> <p><i>"...transferring existing ideas into new opportunities and task,</i></p> <p><i>"... possibility of showing own thinking and business idea..."</i></p> <p><i>"...doing tasks that directly benefit oneself"</i></p> <p><i>"...increased know-how..."</i></p> <p><i>"...in pre-incubator people are using "the same language" and you can reflect your ideas with the others and get support from them – they form a supporting network..."</i></p>

FIGURE 2. Quotations (translated from Finnish) used in reviewing the data.

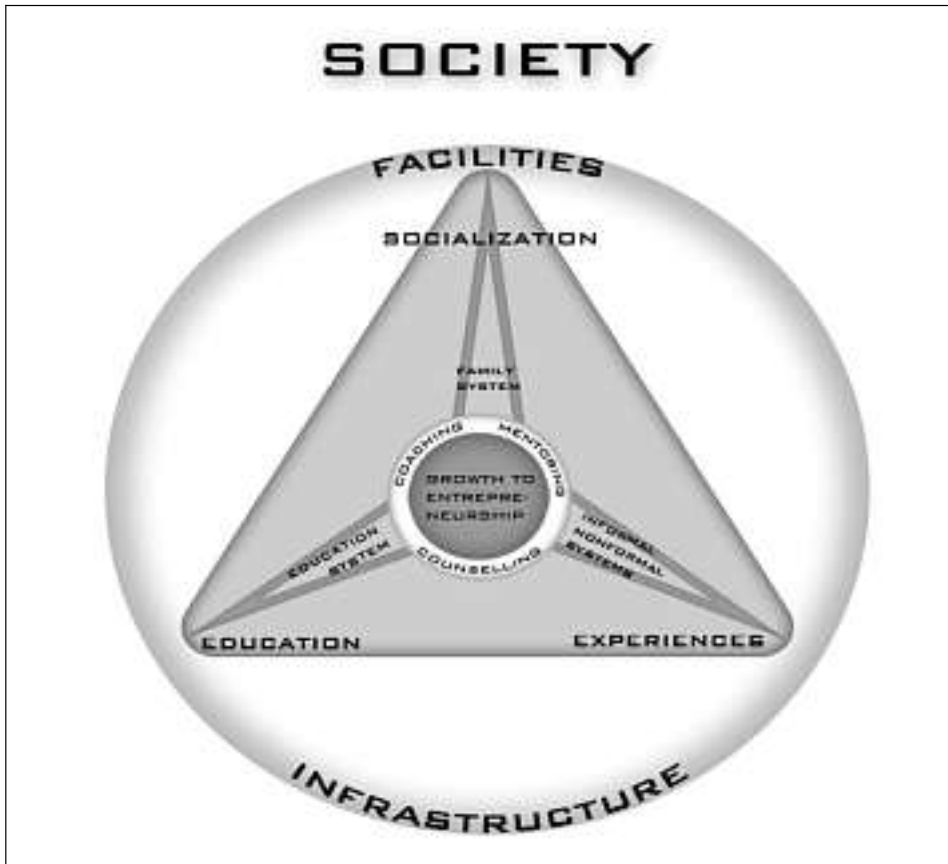


FIGURE 3. Growth to entrepreneurship: Triangulation of socialisation, experiences and education.

4.1 Family system – socialisation

Becoming an entrepreneur or starting a new venture is a complex decision, but previous research supports our finding that parents appear to be a strong influencing factor in this process (Kirkwood 2007; Heck et al. 2008). According to our informants, family members are often assisting in the process and sometimes they also help with finding the capital needed for starting a new venture.

"It is true that my family members encourage me even though people say that entrepreneurship is not the way to become rich. My father has always given me financial advice and he has also helped me financially."

The nature of family influence is not thoroughly known (Kirkwood 2007), but our study indicates that family values, adopting an active life-style and a proactive attitude towards work are the main

factors that matter when students start thinking about their career options. Our informants had grown up in environments in which doing, working and acting were highly appreciated.

“I really need to do many things in my life”

Business families often have a mutual dream of a successful family business, leading to the (financial) well-being of the family. But when we carefully examine personal needs and goal-settings, it often seems to be the personal needs of the founder of the firm on which these mutual dreams are ultimately based. When the offspring start planning their future and careers, they also have to make the decision whether to continue the family firm or not. If the mutual dream still is “mutual”, the offspring may be interested in continuing the business, but there may also be a number reasons why they may not be interested in the family business or in entrepreneurial career in the first place. (Römer-Paakkanen and Rauhala 2007.) A family business is a family matter, but it is also a personal matter when children make decisions whether to continue. An entrepreneurial career is very much influenced by other circumstances, related to both personal life and family circles. In one sense, the offspring start their “incubation processes” as early as in childhood. Parents, other relatives and entrepreneurs within the social neighbourhood may support and reflect the ideas of the following generation (i.e. our student informants): Family businesses offer counselling and mentoring to the younger generations.

“I think that the conversations are most important. It is fine to have the possibility to tell my ideas to someone who understands entrepreneurship and knows my situation and doesn’t leave me alone with my “silly” idea. I sell my idea to at least three family members allowing them to evaluate it.”

Our informants seem to feel that during their pre-incubation at the UAS it is necessary to have sufficient time to study and develop their businesses or business ideas according to their own time-tables. They prefer taking small steps with their business ideas and not to rush in continuing their family businesses. Our results indicate that those pre-incubator students who come from business families tend to have tacit knowledge, and they also utilize it when developing their business ideas. Also Westerholm (2007, 144) argues that entrepreneurial expertise could be explained through tacit knowledge.

4.2 Informal and non-formal systems – free time activities and hobbies

The students, having created their business ideas from their activities and hobbies, are enthusiastic and highly motivated in what they do. In many cases, they are also relatively active and effective in their studies as they search for different ways of completing the courses and they also take part in many special courses, like intensive courses abroad.

"I have so much to do on different areas and it is very hard to make choices; the real difficulty is making choices."

"I feel that to be active in my hobby means activity in other fields as well - like other hobbies, studies and working."

Carrier (2005, 141) complains that many business ideas proposed by management students tend to involve copying and imitating what other people are already doing. According to our informants, learning from what others do is an important way of learning, but when becoming an entrepreneur one should find one's own path in the process of discovering opportunities.

This aspect of not wanting to imitate others might also be one reason why they do not want to continue their family businesses for the time being: They may want to create something of their own instead of developing their parents' ideas. The possibility of using skills and competencies they possess, the self-esteem and the creativity, and the joy of work seem to be the most important motives to create one's own business.

"...opportunity to show creativity and to do things by yourself"

"... possibility of trying harder and thus increase persistence..."

"...ability to organize, lead and learn responsibility..."

Younger generations want to build something for themselves and not just follow their parents' way of life and decisions. This tendency is also obvious in our informants and it indicates that they really have got entrepreneurial spirits and passion for finding their way in life.

Instead of growing their businesses while studying, our informants are satisfied if they can finance their own hobbies using the profit generated through their businesses. Alternatively, they might even be more noble-minded and just want to get more participants into their hobby circles. Our results show that work content produces a greater joy for our informants than the money earned. Koiranen and Karlsson (2002), studying the joy of work, found that ideal work consists of the following features: it varies and offers challenges within one's limits; its contents are considered pleasant; it is meaningful; there exists opportunities for independent action; feedback is offered; and it provides good relationships to be experienced and a pleasant work environment.

Berret, Burton and Slack (1993, 104) stress that entrepreneurs often have a number of common features: Firstly, they want to provide quality products and services. A second common characteristic for most business owners seems to be that they want to be their own bosses. The third feature is that entrepreneurs do not expect to realise substantial financial rewards while operating the business. Many entrepreneurs are in the business because they have a direct interest in it, or they may even feel fanatic for the main activity in business operation. The main target is activity, such as sports and leisure activities, rather than making money.

“Would it not be fun if my hobby could be my profession?”

“My hobby is my passion ... If I can make my living from it ... what could be better?”

“...opportunity to show creativity and to do things by yourself”

In our study, these features appear to be present as the students reported that they want to be their own bosses and not to join family businesses at this point of their lives. They also told that the financial side is not the most important motivation for them. In fact, some respondents seemed to be a bit afraid of if their business would grow very fast and expand to other countries for instance.

“...I want to take small steps...”

They felt that it is risky if a business grows too fast. The interviewees also felt everyone will need an entrepreneurial mindset in the future – intrapreneurship and entrepreneurial spirit in particular.

4.3 Education system – entrepreneurship education and training

According to Thompson (2006, 116) entrepreneurs do not necessarily learn in classrooms but clearly prefer experimental learning. Training programmes, even though they might sometimes be useful, are not the main learning vehicles, but the so-called on-the-job experiences are preferred. Current and future entrepreneurs learn from other successful people (as well as failed entrepreneurs and revered role models), but yet again the trick lies in making sense of the information and the stories that are around. We all can benefit from the help and support of others, but only if they are the “right others”.

“The best teachers have had entrepreneurial habits and attitudes... they have some experience in working in SME’s and also know what entrepreneurship is in the real life.”

Our informants also point out that entrepreneurship cannot be learned in classrooms solely, but by doing it yourself. They also would like to get acquainted with “real, positive and realistic” entrepreneur stories. Such “success and survival stories” encourage our students to continue their own businesses so that they do not feel discouraged when they face their first setbacks in the future.

The informants appreciated that they could do all their study projects in or related to their own businesses. They had the experience that those who own their firms could benefit most from the various projects and studies. Moreover, they wondered if the other students ever understand business as they do not have real life experiences of it. They also point out that it is important to have the SME point of view present in business studies. Our study supports the idea that it is important that the entrepreneurship education or training programmes are perceived concrete and practical enough by those who participate in them. Student entrepreneurs seek for studies and courses which serve their needs and which give them support that they need when developing their ideas.

*“...transferring existing ideas into new opportunities and task,
 “... possibility of showing own thinking and business idea...”*

Put it in other terms, student entrepreneurs create learning environments themselves. Our results, similar to recent study by Westerholm (2007, 122), show that there is a distinct line between competencies and attitudes crucial to an entrepreneur and those needed in business administration. The bedrock of entrepreneur skills consists of cognitive-affective-psychomotor competences and attitudes.

Our results indicate that students learn entrepreneurship by applying things into practise, by doing and experimenting, using examples and making mistakes – by doing things themselves. Learning outcomes are created in a process in which a potential entrepreneur experiments and then applies theoretical knowledge into real-life situations.

*“... learning by doing...”
 “... personal timing...”
 “...Different ways to carry out the studies and self-orientation...”
 “... there is a curriculum but we can make our one study-plan... we must find the interesting courses – for instance the entrepreneurship studies – ourselves ...”*

Our informants had found their entrepreneurial studies by themselves. Information on courses exists but it seems that only the active and enthusiastic students find and take advantage of them.

4.4 Conclusions

There are a number of factors that influence individual growth path towards entrepreneurship: Family members and other entrepreneurs, teachers at school, and coaches in hobbies. Social values provided in family circles, the educational system and studies provide the structure that supports the growth to entrepreneurship and hobbies develop self-esteem and passion for action.

According to our study, teachers and family members can act as counsellors or coaches, depending on their abilities and skills. Teachers in pre-incubators provide individual with advice covering topics ranging from personal requirements and abilities, accounting, business administration, market analysis, legal advice to advertising and marketing. Our student informants reflect and discuss their ideas with family members and they highly appreciate their opinions. It is also important to find good mentors for students as they can learn from other entrepreneurs' experiences. Moreover, people involved in hobbies, a sports coach for instance, may have an important and lasting role when students make their future plans.

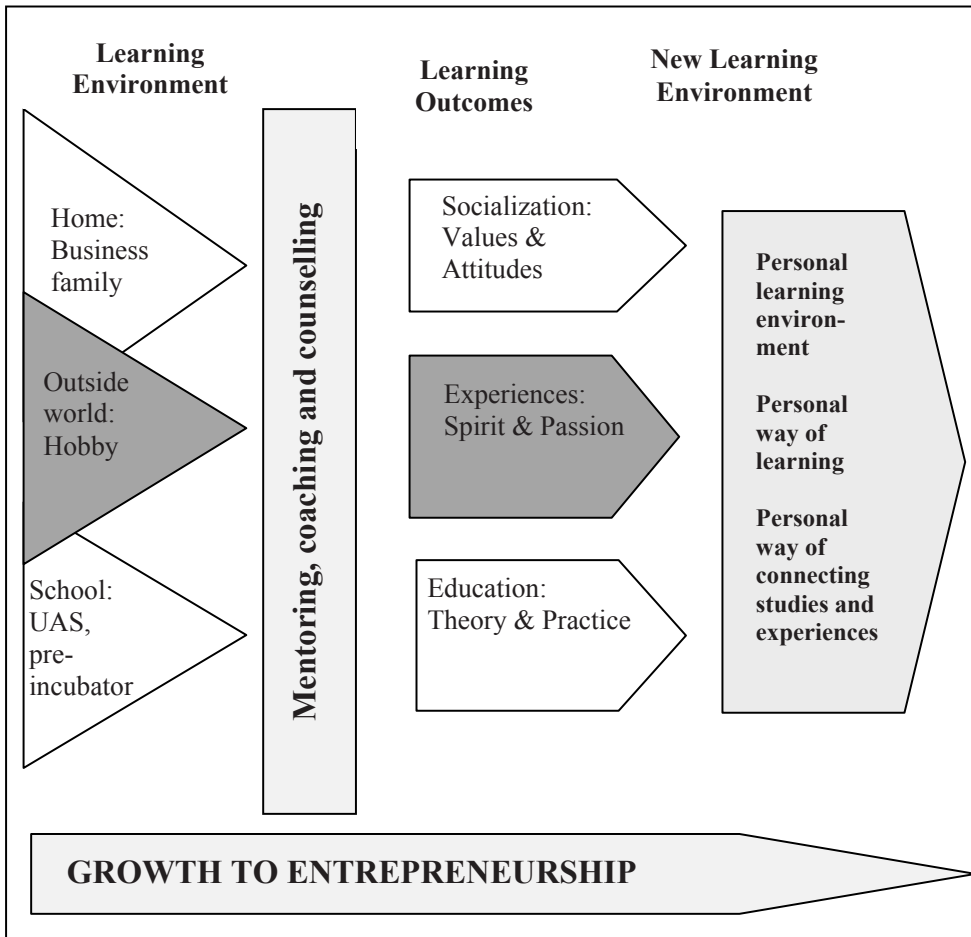


FIGURE 4. *Creating a new personal learning environment.*

Based on our analysis, we suggest that people with entrepreneurial characteristics are active in many fields. The student entrepreneurs we interviewed had three main processes of commitment going on at the same time: their studies, hobbies and running their own businesses. The passion and spirit in hobbies had encouraged them to find out their way of studying and learning. They are enthusiastic in finding their personal way of self-actualisation, both in studies and in creating business ideas.

We envisaged the idea of different learning environments (Figure 1 above) when we planned our interview themes, but those three environments also popped up spontaneously in the student discussions. Both the theory and the qualitative data point to the same direction. The main results

of our study are displayed in Figures 3 and 4 which summarise our findings and portray the students' growth to entrepreneurship.

Our conclusion of Figures 3 and 4 is that students themselves create their personal learning environments in the triangulation process of socialisation, experiences and education. In this process, family provides them with values, the UAS offers the formal structures for learning, and the spirit and passion for action come from hobbies.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Summary

Our theoretical aim was to portray the interplay between different learning environments of pre-incubator students. We found that the students themselves create personal learning environments on the basis of their backgrounds, experiences and studies. In this very environment, there are other actors/factors, like family members, teachers, other entrepreneurs, supervisors and coaches, who can have meaningful roles: They can either support or slow down or even forestall the student's growth to entrepreneurship.

Our practical aim was to find out which the successful combinations of learning objectives, substance, acquired skills, and teaching methods support the learning processes of potential future entrepreneurs. Our results reveal that the methods used should be different not only in the various phases of the learning process but also in the different stages of business. In addition, students' background and experiences has to be taken into account when deciding on the course contents and choosing the methods used in entrepreneurship education.

Assignments in general do not support learning if they are not embedded in real-life situations. For example, when writing a business plan during studies or in a pre-incubator, it is better and more effective, in terms of the learning outcomes, if the participant already has a real business idea. The traditional lecture format may not be the most effective method since it ignores the essence of the entrepreneurial process. Traditional methods may, in fact, inhibit the development of entrepreneurial behaviors or entrepreneurial spirits, which are requisites for entrepreneurial processes.

Our results show that the learning processes of student entrepreneurs are highly personal and holistic. In more particular, those who already know something about entrepreneurship and are active in many fields must be considered as a special group needing counselling and training programs tailored just for them. Some such students have chosen studies at the UAS in order to create and further develop their business ideas. They just want to be trained as entrepreneurs and look for learning business skills.

The informants of our study underlined that the timing of the studies is important. To illustrate

this, the problems that entrepreneurs face daily tend to require immediate solutions; and there is, therefore, no time to wait for a proper course or other type of formal training in order to find solutions to these problems. (Miettinen 2006, 127.) For instance, if a student entrepreneur is negotiating with a client and is in need for some legal advice, it is not always possible to wait until the next course on business law will be arranged.

In this study, the issue of credibility is addressed by the consensus present in the focus-group interviews. All the informants had the same opinion, surprisingly maybe, about the positive influence of their families in their decision-making processes of becoming entrepreneurs. Moreover, they all agreed that self-actualisation was the greatest motivation for planning their own business operations.

5.2 Implementing the results into action

The results of our study offer theory-level suggestions for developing entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship pedagogy in general. When developing business curricula educators are usually thinking of the student body as a single mass. Our study strongly suggests that it is important to acknowledge that entrepreneurship education must be tailored to fit each student and each individual situation so that students are able to create and shape their own learning environments. This study confirms also that it is important for student entrepreneurs that entrepreneurship education is concrete and practical enough.

Advising and counselling taking place at the right time is critical for any entrepreneur, and it is even more important for students with entrepreneurial spirits. Potential entrepreneurs need support in discovering future opportunities and fostering entrepreneurial spirits, whereas existing entrepreneurs need help and training in developing existing business ideas and managing their businesses. We need to provide both kinds of training: Student entrepreneurs in pre-incubators might have planned their own business ideas but need help in developing them. Alternatively, they may need assistance in developing their existing family businesses in the future.

Educators should broaden their horizons and encourage students to set up enterprises which may not primarily be growth oriented. Such businesses may offer students a solid training ground on their way to future entrepreneurship or on their way to continue their family businesses.

5.3 Further research

Heck et al. (2008, 326) argue that entrepreneurship is strongly linked with both individual and social wealth creation and that entrepreneurial activity throughout the world has a familial dimension. Kirkwood (2007b) supports the role of a family as a breeding ground for entrepreneurs and points out that a family is a key place where entrepreneurial spirits are ignited. Even though the importance of one's family has been widely admitted, to date there has been little empirical re-

search on how parents influence their children's subsequent decisions to start new ventures. Our study is aimed at filling this apparent gap. Moreover, our results show that family background has an important role in shaping our students' attitudes and behaviour: The entrepreneurial way of thinking and acting is adopted already in childhood, as our interview results show. For future purposes, it would be important to study this process in more detail and also to explore reasons why some offspring in business families do not want to become entrepreneurs or to continue family businesses while some members do so with clear intentionality as they choose to study business and clearly want to create their own businesses.

One perspective for future studies would be to further investigate the role of counselling and coaching processes at the Finnish UAS pre-incubators and to find out ways of making the best use of existing entrepreneurs and family members as educators and mentors. In order to develop the counselling and coaching processes at pre-incubators, we should also study the entrepreneurial learning processes of our students in more detail.

To develop business studies overall and the existing pre-incubator processes we should also investigate (possibly with a larger group of student informants) what kinds of business ideas stem from students' hobbies. This means exploring of the types of entrepreneurial spirit and concrete business ideas arising from sports and music culture, design and crafts. ■

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