



Exploring the Role of Inspiration in Entrepreneurship Education

SUMMARY

The article addresses the problem of shaping entrepreneurial postures and attitudes within entrepreneurship education. Over the last decades entrepreneurship education has become a vital area of research, classroom practice and policy regulations and is widely considered as one of the key instruments to increase entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions of potential entrepreneurs. However, there is no clear consensus as to the factors that directly influence individual decisions to start new ventures. Therefore, there still exists a need to further clarify which elements in entrepreneurship education play a role in influencing new venture creation. This paper attempts to contribute to filling this gap by providing insight into the role of inspiration in entrepreneurship education. The results of a pilot survey questionnaire conducted over a period of three years among undergraduate students reveal that inspiration may be among the most relevant factors explaining entrepreneurial drive. The paper attempts to explain the inspiration phenomenon and draw conclusions in the form of suggested approaches to applied pedagogy to contribute to modern day entrepreneurship education.

→ **KEYWORDS** – ENTREPRENEURSHIP, EDUCATION, INSPIRATION,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP PEDAGOGY, CONSTRUCTIVIST
EDUCATION, SOCIAL LEARNING

STRESZCZENIE

Rola inspiracji w edukacji dla przedsiębiorczości

Niniejszy artykuł jest głosem w dyskusji nad kształtowaniem postaw przedsiębiorczych w edukacji dla przedsiębiorczości. W ostatnich dekadach edukacja dla przedsiębiorczości stała się ważnym obszarem badań, praktyki edukacyjnej i polityki edukacyjnej państwa. Postrzegana jest jako ważny element zarówno kształtowania kultury

przedsiębiorczości w kraju, jak i generowania przyszłych przedsiębiorców. Nie ma jednak jasności co dokładnie, w ramach tej edukacji, przyczynia się do kształtowania postaw i zachowań przedsiębiorczych. Niższe opracowanie zwraca uwagę na rolę inspiracji w kształtowaniu przedsiębiorczych decyzji uczniów i studentów kursów przedsiębiorczości. Artykuł prezentuje wyniki badania ankietowego przeprowadzonego wśród studentów na przestrzeni trzech lat, które sugerują, że inspiracja odgrywa istotną rolę w kształtowaniu postaw przedsiębiorczych. Opracowanie zakończone jest sugestiami podejść pedagogicznych, które mogą się przyczynić do rozwijania czynnika inspiracji wśród studentów.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** – PRZEDSIĘBIORCZOŚĆ, EDUKACJA, INSPIRACJA, KONSTRUKCYJNISTYCZNE PODEJŚCIE W EDUKACJI, SPOŁECZNE UCZENIE SIĘ

The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains.
The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher
inspires.

William Arthur Ward

Introduction

The inclusion of entrepreneurial education into mainstream curriculum from an early age is an increasing process in modern societies, as demand for modern-day entrepreneurs is growing. Countries recognize the need for not only future founders of successful ventures, but also for developing skills traditionally associated with entrepreneurship such as creativity, proactiveness, initiative or organization skills. The European commission identifies that “education and entrepreneurship have a critical role to play in maintaining and further enhancing Europe’s position as a key global player in the coming year.”¹

The new European conceptual frameworks for entrepreneurship encourage innovative pedagogies to build and “entrepreneurial spirit, development of creativity, initiative and self confidence.”² Repeatedly, these features have been identified in the past as the goals of entrepreneurial education. A meta-analysis conducted by Mwasalwiba of top entrepreneurship

¹ Analytical Report “Entrepreneurship in the EU and Beyond”, European Commission, Flash Eurobarometer, (2010) no. 283.

² Ibidem.

education publications, identifies the following among the goals of the education process:

- to enhance attitudes, values, intentions and behaviors – 36%,
- to improve personal skills – 32%,
- to develop opportunity recognition skills – 18%,
- to develop skills necessary for establishing a new business – 9% and
- to acquire general management and organizational skills – 9%.³

The analysis of other publications reveals a very clear hierarchy of goals within entrepreneurship education, consistent with the above meta-analysis. All existing conceptualizations include the dominating goal of developing an entrepreneurial drive, spirit and culture among students. Second in line, is the goal of generating the ability to recognize and pursue opportunities in various areas, whether business, social, or academic.⁴ A significant number of authors associate entrepreneurship with the ability to create and operate new firms.⁵ Rachwał writes that among other areas, entrepreneurial education takes place where students acquire skills necessary to lead successful and responsible lives.⁶ Among goals depicted as attitudes in entrepreneurial education Makiela and Rachwał outline:

- understanding the reasons for developing own entrepreneurial potential;
- assuming responsibility for self and others;
- possessing ability to align self interest with other people's interests;
- exposing positive attitudes towards people;
- engaging in dialog;
- acquiring skills to recognize and prioritize moral values;

³ Cf. E.S. Mwasalwiba, *Entrepreneurship Education: a Review of its Objectives, Teaching Methods and Impact Indicators*, "Education and Training" 52 (2010) 1, pp. 20-47.

⁴ Cf. M. Raposo, A. Paco, *Entrepreneurship Education: Relationship between Education and Entrepreneurial Activity*, "Psicothema" 23 (2011) 3, pp. 453-457.

⁵ Cf. S. Bridge, C. Hegarty, S. Porter, *Rediscovering Enterprise: Developing Appropriate University Entrepreneurship Education*, "Journal of Education and Training" 52 (2010) 8/9, pp. 722-734.

⁶ Cf. T. Rachwał, *Kształtowanie postaw uczniów na lekcjach przedsiębiorczości*, "Przedsiębiorczość – Edukacja" 1 (2005), p. 138.

- understanding the role of ethics in social and economic life.⁷

Although authors agree that entrepreneurship education cannot and should not be limited to acquiring the skills necessary to start your own business,⁸ education for entrepreneurship does not abandon the ultimate goal of encouraging and nurturing future entrepreneurs.⁹ That is the optimal output for the economy and society as a whole. In spite of the fact that the discussion on how to develop and nurture successful entrepreneurs through education practices has spanned several decades, it still remains a challenge. The social debate over these issues among educators, managers, business owners and policy makers and subsequent frameworks have not delivered one universal model of educating future entrepreneurs. Therefore, a need still exists to further clarify which elements in entrepreneurship education play a role in influencing entrepreneurial behaviors as well as entrepreneurial skills. This paper attempts to contribute to filling this gap by exploring the role of inspiration in entrepreneurship education first referring to theory findings, then by presenting student survey results. The driving question of this research is: what sparks the entrepreneurship formation process? Furthermore, how do students perceive the goals of their entrepreneurial education in the light of entrepreneurship formation? The paper attempts to explain the inspiration phenomenon and draw conclusions in the form of suggested approaches to applied pedagogy to contribute to modern day entrepreneurship education.

Education for Entrepreneurship

The European Commission's idea of entrepreneurship education is an echo of multiple publications in this domain of the last two decades, which represents a sharp shift from educating

⁷ Cf. Z. Makiela, T. Rachwał, *Podstawy Przedsiębiorczości. Program nauczania dla liceum ogólnokształcącego, liceum profilowanego i technikum*, Warszawa 2003.

⁸ Cf. T. Rachwał, *Kształtowanie postaw uczniów na lekcjach przedsiębiorczości*, op. cit.

⁹ Cf. D.F. Kuratko, *The Emergence of Entrepreneurship Education: Development, Trends, and Challenges*, "Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice" 29 (2005) 5, pp. 577-598.

about entrepreneurship to educating for entrepreneurship. Education about entrepreneurship is limited to knowledge transfer. Students learn numerous definitions of entrepreneurship, they learn about starting a business, about legal and business frameworks, what it means to be entrepreneurial or how to prepare a business plan. The list is long. The goal of this type of education is to acquaint students with many aspects of entrepreneurial practice and pursue their understanding of them. The educational effects of educating about entrepreneurship can be verified by testing the new knowledge acquisition or assessing a new business plan. Educating about entrepreneurship does not imply however that students become more entrepreneurial nor that they wish to act in entrepreneurial ways.¹⁰

Educating for entrepreneurship is driven by a different goal. It is to develop real-life entrepreneurial skills and behaviors. Some authors go as far as to say that the goal is to change thinking and behavioral patterns.¹¹ This type of education output cannot be achieved by passive forms of teaching nor can it be verified by testing. Skills, attitudes and behaviors can be developed only through action-oriented education and self-reflection. Rae defines entrepreneurial learning as “led by creativity, informality, curiosity, emotion and its application to personal and real-world problems and opportunities.”¹² It is a long process with no shortcuts. It is a holistic process, engaging numerous areas of human activity, primarily intellectual and emotional. In addition, it can be a life changing experience.

Therefore, modern practice-based approaches to entrepreneurship education reveal a shift from passive forms of teaching and learning focused on knowledge acquisition towards active, engaging, inclusive and holistic forms, focused on skills acquisition and attitude formation. These expectations are not confined to knowledge transfer, but rather focus on the formation of future entrepreneurs. Formation is a process that occurs when

¹⁰ Cf. D. Rae, *Entrepreneurial Learning: a Narrative-based Conceptual Model*, “Journal of Small Business & Enterprise Development” 12 (2005) 3, pp. 323-335.

¹¹ Cf. *ibidem*.

¹² Cf. D. Rae, *Universities and Enterprise Education: Responding to the Challenges of the New Era*, “Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development” 17 (2010) 4, pp. 591-606: 595.

teaching and learning intersect.¹³ This intersection is the goal of every teacher at every educational stage. Contemporary pedagogies articulate the role of inspiration as a key factor for the intersection of teaching and learning suggesting that inspiration sparks students' will and motivation to engage in the learning process.¹⁴ This is confirmed by several authors referring to entrepreneurship education, who emphasize the role of mentors' inspiration in entrepreneurial education.¹⁵

Grasping the Essence of Inspiration

According to the Merriam Webster dictionary inspiration is “the action or power of moving the intellect or emotions” or put simply: “something that makes someone want to do something or that gives someone an idea about what to do or create” (www.merriam-webster.com). Etymologically the word inspiration refers to spirit. That may pertain to its origin or source of inspiration, as well as a mental effect of that source – that of influencing the human spirit. Authors agree that inspiration moves the human spirit and triggers human thought, speech or action and directs these manifestations.¹⁶ We therefore understand inspiration as mental influencing.

Inspiration causes certain psychological effects in people, yet it is a particular case of causation. This causation is very difficult, if not impossible to foresee and plan. It is an individualistic experience and highly intangible. That means that inspiration does not follow the path of cause and effect as in the natural sciences. It is much less predictable than some human psychology theories,

¹³ Cf. J. Schuitema, G. Dam, W. Veugelers, *Teaching Strategies for Moral Education: a Review*, “Journal of Curriculum Studies” 40 (2007), pp. 1-21.

¹⁴ Cf. J. Levy, T. Wubbels, P. Brok and M. Brekelmans, *Students' Perceptions of Inter-personal Aspects of the Learning Environment*, “Learning Environments Research” 6 (2003), pp. 5-36.

¹⁵ Cf. L. Pittaway, J. Cope, *Entrepreneurship Education: a Systematic Review of the Evidence*, “International Small Business Journal” 25 (2007) 5, pp. 479-510; C. Rigg and B. O'Dwyer, *Becoming an Entrepreneur: Researching the Role of Mentors in Identity Construction*, “Education and Training” 54 (2012) 4, pp. 319-329.

¹⁶ Cf. T. Van der Zee, A. Jong, *Teachers as a Source of Inspiration in Catholic Schools*, “Journal of Empirical Theology” 22 (2009) 1, pp. 7-29.

such as positive reinforcement. Inspiration processes in education have not been studied extensively and still remain on the periphery of academic research. Authors agree, however, that in the case of mental causation there may be foreseeable laws governing it, but certainly no laws in the scientific sense. Human mental processes are highly subjective, cannot be separated from the person, and are therefore strictly personal. In principle, the person is always free and can choose from various alternatives, which refers directly to teachers' and learners' interactions, and to the former inspiring the latter.

Entrepreneurial education may involve several areas of inspiration manifested in and outside the classroom:

- Influence on human thought, such as mental processes sparking the idea of starting a business or becoming more engaged and proactive,
- Influence on human speech sparking the students to ask questions and thus be more involved in the formation process,
- Most importantly influence on human behavior, such as active engagement in the learning process or action oriented behavior at opportunity recognition.

All of the above forms of inspiration and its effects involve the human spirit and therefore combine a deep, strong engagement of reason, emotion and spirit. Inspiration can be compared to an awakening and suddenly being able to see, understand more and very often want more. That is the goal of entrepreneurial formation: to awaken the sleeping entrepreneur, to awaken the dreaming potential of our students, to activate their thought, speech and behavior.

The most important question for any kind of education remains: what provides inspiration? The most obvious answer is: anything. That is most likely true, as the human mind works in wondrous ways. Yet for the purpose of this paper, we must focus on the potential sources of inspiration we are able to identify for entrepreneurial education. According to Maritain, first and foremost people are inspired through other people.¹⁷ That process can occur through all forms of communication, both verbal and non-verbal, written and oral. Students observe teachers

¹⁷ Cf. R. Król, *Jacques Maritain. Inspiration for the Discovery of European Man*, "Civitas. Studies on Politics Philosophy" 9 (2006), pp. 68-80.

and listen to their words. Teachers can inspire students by how they behave, what they say and how they say it.¹⁸ When people communicate – whether linguistically or behaviorally – they perform certain acts via words and/or actions embedded in language or behavior. These are all means of communication. Therefore, the main source of inspiration are other people, not only teachers, but also guest speakers including traditional entrepreneurs, managers, social entrepreneurs, activists, community leaders and others. The process of inspiration may also be sparked by observing and analyzing certain events or objects. Exposing students to real-life entrepreneurship cases and involving them in action-oriented projects raises the probability of inspiration taking place.

Inspiration happens however, when these means have reached the individual and have been decoded and absorbed by him. Teachers only have control over the first part of this process. The second part is individualistic and personal. That is why teachers or events can inspire some people quite powerfully, whereas they will have no inspirational effect on others. Inspirational effects differ from one person to another. People's inspirational impact lies not only in the excellence of their words or actions, but also in the receiver's aptitude. Inspiring others implies 'awakening' them to ideas or desires for which they have a special propensity. That is most often hidden from us teachers. Aptitude, sensitivity, competence and propensities are special kinds of mental state and are not yet directed to objects or actions in the real world, but rather waiting to be directed. Inspiration can elevate and bring these qualities to life by transforming them into more concrete mental states such as: desires, plans or intentions.

As a closing remark to theoretical exploration, it is concluded that inspiration may be regarded as a mental causation process that, through the qualities of the source of inspiration may motivate people, on the basis of prior aptitudes, to have certain behavioral desires and intentions. People, objects or events may be the source of inspiration in entrepreneurial education by connecting their personal dispositions with the subject matter (in this case – entrepreneurship) and showing how that subject relates to them personally.

¹⁸ Cf. T. Van der Zee, A. Jong, *Teachers as a Source of Inspiration in Catholic Schools*, op. cit.

Survey Results

In order to explore the recognition of the role of inspiration in the entrepreneurship education process, a three year pilot study was conducted on 230 undergraduate students from the Cracow University of Economics enrolled in an entrepreneurship course. The research sample comprised students between 21 and 23 years old, studying economics and public administration. The sample may display bias due to students having the same educational background and moreover having taken the same entrepreneurship course with the same professor. Taking all these limitations into consideration, this pilot study revealed the students' perception and opinion about entrepreneurship education.

The course attended by students is based on a constructivist approach to education comprising the following outcomes:

1. Knowledge formation through social interactions.
2. Skills developed through hands-on activities.
3. Attitudes and postures developed through real-life projects and exposure to contemporary issues and challenges (local and global).
4. Inspiration sparked by interactions with inspiring individuals, real-life ventures and exciting innovation.

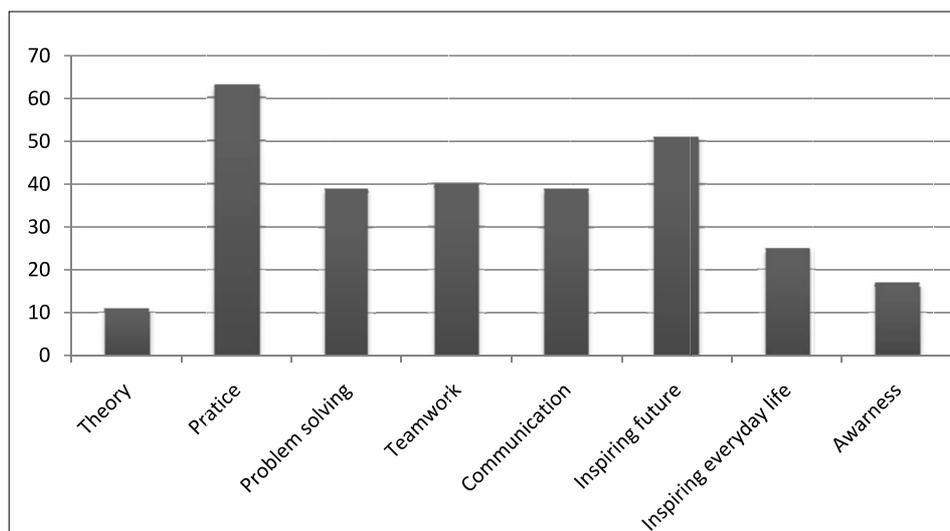
The students were asked to fill in a survey questionnaire after completing the course. The choice to conduct the survey after the course derived from the assumption that students who have not taken any entrepreneurship courses are not in a position to provide a credible assessment of what they consider most important within that field of their education. Having taken the course, the students were able to develop their own judgment about the importance of various course outcomes and evaluate them according to their subjective criteria. The survey questionnaire was comprised of one simple question: What effects of your entrepreneurship education do you consider most valuable? The students were to choose and mark three out of the six following course outcomes:

1. Theoretical knowledge relating to entrepreneurship types, features and concepts.
2. Practical knowledge such as how to start a business and how to prepare a business plan.
3. Problem solving skills.
4. Teamwork skills.

5. Communication skills
6. Inspiration for future education and career path.
7. Inspiration for everyday life.
8. Raised awareness about contemporary local and global challenges.

8 out of 230 questionnaires were invalid, giving a final sample of 222. Figure 1 presents the survey results. 63% of respondents marked practical knowledge as an important course outcome in their entrepreneurship education. This is not surprising, as earlier studies, through self-assessed evaluation of learning outcomes, have signaled that entrepreneurship students value practical knowledge that can be applied in the future.¹⁹ Inspiration for future education and career path was marked by 51% of the respondents indicating that students value this course outcome as the second most important. Nearly 40% consider all three groups of skills (problem solving, teamwork and communication) as vital in their entrepreneurship education. 25% of the survey group signaled that inspiration for everyday life is an important element of the course outcomes. 27% of respondents believe that raising awareness about local and global challenges is an important outcome and 11% of students value theoretical knowledge.

Figure 1. Survey results (percentages)



Source: own evaluation.

¹⁹ Cf. U. Hytti, P. Stenholm, J. Heinonen, J. Seikkula-Leino, *Perceived Learning Outcomes in Entrepreneurship Education: the Impact of Student Motivation and Team Behavior*, "Education and Training" 52 (2010) 8/9, pp. 587-606.

The results display an unexpected high evaluation of course outcomes related to inspiration. Students consider inspiration for their future educational and career decisions as the second most important learning outcome. This data is optimistic and encouraging for entrepreneurship educators and suggests that inspiration does play a role in students' future decisions, including that of becoming entrepreneurs. Furthermore, respondents have marked outcomes related to inspiration for everyday life as more important than raising awareness and theoretical knowledge. This might suggest that entrepreneurship education might have an impact on students' behavior patterns and shape their attitudes and behaviour. Again this is conclusive with recent findings suggesting that entrepreneurship education inspires students in their life choices and behaviors and thus influences attitudes.²⁰

The study results send an important signal to entrepreneurship educators in terms of designing the course content and evaluating course outcomes. The study suggests that students expect entrepreneurship education to be inspirational and can recognize that content and learning outcomes are related to inspiration.

Conclusions and Future Recommendations

The notion that entrepreneurship education should not only develop knowledge, skills and attitudes, but also inspire students has not yet been raised to a popular extent. This paper represents one of the first attempts to explain the inspiration phenomenon in entrepreneurship education. There are four major conclusions deriving from the study.

1. The findings of this theoretical and empirical research show that inspiration may play an important role in entrepreneurship education, being the first and decisive element which starts up the entrepreneurial mind and gets it going. A human mind is strongly rational and therefore needs a reason to engage in the learning and discovery process. Inspiration can play that role. Once students

²⁰ Cf. D.A. Kirby, H. Humayun, *Outcomes of an Entrepreneurship Education Program: an Empirical Study in Egypt*, "International Journal of Management" 30 (2013) 3, p. 23-35.

resonate with an element of the course content (that being person, event, object or idea) they undergo a process of mental stimulation and motivation. The result of the inspiration process is a new desire or intention focused on the subject of the matter.

2. Inspirational effects differ from one person to another since aptitude, sensitivity, competence and propensities are very individual and personal qualities.
3. Inspirational effects depend on two factors: quality of the source of inspiration and individual aptitude.
4. Inspiration happens mostly through human interactions.
5. Students perceive inspiration for future education and career decisions as an important learning outcome in their entrepreneurship education.

Having said that, a general emerging conclusion is that the role of the educator is to supply the entrepreneurship course with high quality inspirational input of various types. The sources of potential inspiration should vary and include numerous social interactions. Some educational approaches fill this role better than others. Contemporary research has established that entrepreneurship education cannot be limited to passive and narrative forms of teaching and learning. Many authors agree that entrepreneurship education needs to include active forms of teaching and learning involving real-life cooperation with entrepreneurs and simulations of start-up activities.²¹ This paper proposes a constructivist and social pedagogy for entrepreneurship, as approaches that enable the process of inspiration and thus enhance the formation of future entrepreneurs.

Constructivist educational theories hold that people construct their own knowledge by integrating new ideas and experiences into their previous knowledge. Knowledge is not something “out there” waiting to be collected. Instead, individuals are active in creating their own understanding of new ideas or concepts.²² They

²¹ Cf. K. Wach, *Edukacja na rzecz przedsiębiorczości wobec współczesnych wyzwań cywilizacyjno-gospodarczych*, „Przedsiębiorczość – Edukacja” 9 (2013), pp. 246-257.

²² Cf. G. Tenenbaum, S. Naidu, O. Jegede, J. Austin, *Constructivist Pedagogy in Conventional On-campus and Distance Learning Practice: an Exploratory Investigation*, “Learning and Instruction” 11 (2001) 2, pp. 87-111.

become the constructor of their body of knowledge, whereas the teacher takes on a facilitating role. The implication is that they learn best through active engagement in problems, analysis, planning and self-reflection. The main components of constructivist pedagogies include:

- engaging in real-life examples,
- discussions and debates,
- conceptual conflicts and dilemmas,
- reflections and concept investigation,
- materials and measures targeted toward solutions.²³

Social learning theories, on the other hand, emphasize the role of social aspects of learning, in two ways. The first is the idea that without interaction and communication between people there can be no thinking. Social learning perspectives suggest that people make sense of new ideas and are able to give them meaning only through dialogue with others, a term referred to in scholarly research as social constructionism.²⁴

A second angle on social learning is the role of the social environment for learning. Crafting that environment and extending it far outside the classroom enables students to meet various community members and practitioners within the entrepreneurship domain. Surrounding cultural values and practices play a key role in fostering and promoting learning as well as inducting new members to the institutional norms and ways to be in a community of practice.²⁵

Coffield offers the metaphors of acquisition and participation for thinking about constructivist and social learning processes. The acquisition metaphor sees learning as the individual “gaining possession of knowledge, skills and qualifications, just as people acquire cars, watches and houses.”²⁶ The participation metaphor, very differently,

²³ Cf. *ibidem*.

²⁴ Cf. C. Rigg and B. O'Dwyer, *Becoming an Entrepreneur: Researching the Role of Mentors in Identity Construction*, op. cit., pp. 319-329.

²⁵ Cf. E. Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Cambridge, MA 2002, p. 36.

²⁶ F. Coffield, *Just Suppose Teaching and Learning Became the First Priority*, London 2008, p. 8.

locates learning not in the heads of individuals, but in the simultaneous social processes of: learning to belong to different 'communities of practice,' to recognize changes in our identity, to create meaning out of our experiences; and learning what it means to know in practice.

In the social learning approach, "learning is understood as something that is done; learning is practical and embodied, that is, it involves our emotions and our bodies as well as our brains."²⁷

Both these pedagogies offer the advantage of including numerous sources of stimuli and potential inspiration. Furthermore, they enable the learner to follow that inspiration through engaging in various activities. In relation to entrepreneurship education, constructivist and social learning approaches highlight the notion of people learning to be an entrepreneur, to embody and enact entrepreneurship not only as an individual, but through, with and in connection with others. The learner is seen as someone being transformed into a practitioner, whose changing knowledge, skills and discourse are part of a developing identity. The learner has a chance to become member of a community of practice. A constructivist approach to education emphasizes the role of the learner as the constructor of his knowledge with the teacher providing numerous and varied building blocks. The process can be identified as educational empowerment, enabling students to gain self confidence, self-awareness and new behavioral patterns. All of these outputs are identified as critical for entrepreneurial behaviors.

The role of inspiration in entrepreneurship education should be further researched using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to deliver testable hypotheses. It is recommended that research further explores this phenomenon by explaining the "what" and "how" of inspiration; specific sources of inspiration as well as factors enabling and facilitating the process. Furthermore, research should expand in the area of if and how inspiration relates to actual entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors. A concerted effort in these areas can surely enhance our understanding of educational and formation processes and establish more effective learning practices.

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