Sustainable Entrepreneurship Undergraduate Education: A case study in a Scandinavian Business School

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Problem Statement and Aim

Undergraduate education for sustainability calls for new kinds of collective learning that are not so much of a transmissive nature (i.e. learning as reproduction) but rather of a transformative nature (i.e. learning as change) (Chawla and Flanders Cushing, 2007). This education with a transformative nature is becoming more important in support of the Principles of Responsible Management Education (c.f. Dickson, EckmanLoker, and Jirousek, 2013). Thereby, embodying an active care for sustainable entrepreneurship at undergraduate education implies having an education that includes socialization for sustainability skills and values, and the development of a personal and a collective sense of competence (e.g. Gundlach, and Zivnuska, 2010). Undergraduate education on sustainable entrepreneurship needs to allow faculty members and students the opportunity to participate and influence a variety of processes (cf. Amatucci, Pizarro, and Friedlander, 2013; Gericke, Höglund, and Bergman, 2014) in order to encourage them to be active citizens (c.f. civic engagement Putnam, 1993). There is however, a lack of research focusing on processes addressing how universities are developing sustainable entrepreneurship undergraduate courses that promotes engagement in social change. The aim of this paper is thereby to explore how a university creates an undergraduate course on sustainable entrepreneurship by engaging its faculty and students in social change. To fulfil this purpose, we rely on theory of situated learning and communities of practices and conduct a case study of the renewal of a course at undergraduate level in a Scandinavian business school.

Theoretical framework

Situated learning takes its focus in the relationship between learning and the social situations in which it occurs – in certain forms of co-participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) like for example communities of practice (Wenger, 2011). Building communities of practice is an approach that is not reduced to traditional forms of teaching restricted to classrooms. Within a situated learning approach, the individuals acquire the skills to perform by engaging gradually in processes of doing via ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991:29). This concept denotes the mode of engagement of learners that requires newcomers to move gradually toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community. Communities of practice provides educators with for instance an experiential learning approach to their courses (Gundlach, and Zivnuska, 2010).

Research Method

We conducted a case study of the renewal of the undergraduate elective course “New Venture Development” at Jonkoping International Business School in Sweden by exploring how faculty utilized situated learning and communities of practice as a pedagogical approach to develop new tools. This business school have been developing its processes, activities and education in line with PRME. Pedagogical tools consisted on the sustainable venture toolkit, the sustainable Entrepreneurship Festival, and a capstone project. With these tools students were engaged on finding ways to meet the challenges of sustainability. Case research was particularly useful at the early stages of theory development when key themes need to be identified (Eisenhardt, 1989). This paper followed procedures recommended for conducting
case study research (Miles and Huberman, 1984). We collected data by means of interviews from students to students, group and individual reflections on their learning journeys. To narrate the process of creation of a community of practice, we combined students’ accounts of the course and their reflections of their learning journeys.

**Findings and Contribution**
The study revealed the processes for constructing an approach for sustainable entrepreneurship education in an undergraduate course. Institutional entrepreneurs/faculty members and students co-created a community of practice for sustainable entrepreneurship. Students experienced learning by designing (i.e. using the toolkit to map their sustainable venture idea) to learning by reflecting (i.e. meeting a number of mentors and changing their ideas, and reflecting after the festival on it) to learning by doing (i.e. preparing basic prototypes for the Sustainable Entrepreneurship Festival and pitching their projects). By combining supplementary tools along different course moments, students built a better understanding of the challenges of sustainability. Overall, faculty, practitioners and students engaged in rich discussions of business ideas anchored in a triple bottom line approach. The Sustainable Entrepreneurship Festival provided a key arena for building a community of practice that enhanced their learning as well as stimulated students to contribute to create solutions that either alleviate poverty, provide access to services, integrate immigrants, etc.