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Diseño curricular: Un enfoque 'gestalt' a la pedagogía educativa del desarrollo empresarial con profesores que estudian un posgraduado en una universidad irlandesa

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Abstract: Significant evidence exists attributing the importance of entrepreneurship education (EE) to national competitive advantage (Henry and Treanor, 2012; Porter, 2011; Porter and Kramer, 2011; Carree and Thurik, 2010). Student numbers in formal EE programs in Irish second level schools are limited to those opting for special programs. This paper sets out to identify a more appropriate pedagogical approach to forming student teachers as teachers of EE in Irish second level schools. An action research methodology was adopted to review and improve the EE module on the teacher education postgraduate diploma in business in an Irish university. By adopting a gestalt approach, the researchers aimed to foster heightened awareness in teachers, to embed innovative pedagogical practice in EE paralleling best practice elsewhere. Rigor was added to the researchers' analysis of their own phenomenological interpretations of the module by incorporating feedback from focus groups of students involved, and individual students. The findings suggest that time constraints constricted development of an andragogical holistic approach, organic to fostering creativity and self-agency, the very gestalt characteristics aimed at being cultivated. Students expressed satisfaction with the collaborative course components – experiential and action centered. Grounded in the gestalt philosophy of awareness, self-regulation and creativity, it challenged static, traditional, didactic understandings of EE. For some students, this proved a significant challenge. The key finding from this study is that a holistic, two-layered approach, comprising of a foundational layer (encompassing practical steps in business start ups) and a transformational layer (focusing on more dynamic concepts that are philosophical and attitudinal in nature), is the optimal pedagogical strategy for the cultivation of an effective EE programme.

Resumen: Existe una evidencia significativa que asigna la importancia de la educación del desarrollo empresarial (EE) a la ventaja o beneficio competitivo nacional (Henry y Treanor, 2012; Porter, 2011; Porter y Kramer, 2011; Carree y Thurik, 2010). El número de estudiantes en programas oficiales de EE en institutos irlandeses está limitado a aquellos que optan a programas especiales dentro de los mismos. Este trabajo tiene la intención de identificar un enfoque pedagógico más apropiado para formar profesores que siguen con sus estudios como profesores de EE en institutos irlandeses. Se aceptó una medida para investigar la metodología y así mejorar el módulo de posgrado del título de profesorado con la especialidad en negocios en una universidad irlandesa. Adoptando este enfoque, los investigadores apuntan a promover una mayor conciencia en los profesores, para incorporar una práctica pedagógica más innovadora en EE. Se añadió rigurosidad a los análisis de los investigadores de sus interpretaciones fenomenológicas del módulo, a través del recibimiento de feedback por parte de los grupos de estudiantes involucrados así como de estudiantes a nivel particular. Las conclusiones sugieren que el tiempo limita o restringe el desarrollo del enfoque holístico-andragógico, consistente en poblar de creatividad y autonomía las muy 'gestálticas' características apuntadas y adquiridas. Los alumnos mostraron su satisfacción con los componentes colaborativos del curso – centrados en la autorregulación y la práctica. Estos estaban basados en la filosofía del conocimiento, de la experiencia y de la creatividad, de 'Gestalt'. Todo ello desafiando a los invariantes, tradicionales y conocimientos didácticos del EE. Esto, para algunos alumnos, supuso todo un reto. El resultado de este estudio es un enfoque holístico de dos niveles. Un primer nivel que lo denominaremos como la base (que abarca etapas prácticas iniciales en temas de empresa) y un segundo nivel transformacional (centrado en conceptos más dinámicos, los cuales son, de carácter, filosóficos y actitudinales por naturaleza). Este resultado será la estrategia pedagógica óptima para el refinamiento y la sofisticación de un programa efectivo de EE.

Keywords: Curriculum design; Entrepreneurship Education; Gestalt; Holistic; Experiential; Pedagogy; Transformational; Enterprise

Palabras clave: Diseño curricular; Educación del desarrollo empresarial; Gestalt; Holístico; Experiencial; Pedagogía transformacional; Empresa

1. Introduction

The Irish second level schools system is characterised by an academic and subject orientated curriculum. EE has traditionally been offered as a subset of business subjects. At junior cycle, many students encounter EE in the subject – Business Studies. However, this experience is not often possible at senior cycle, as Business may not be an option for students.

Some variations in the curriculum have occurred. The introduction of the Transition Year (TY) in the mid 1980s between junior and senior cycle, has offered a new dimension in the experience of teaching and learning. There is no national public examination at the end of TY, the program is optional as only some schools provide it and not all students opt to participate in TY. The program offers, inter-alia, a module in EE closely linked with a simulation experience called Mini-Company. Teachers are afforded wide discretion in conceptualising and devising this experience.

Emerging complementary and alternative senior cycle programmes, i.e. the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCAP) have an embedded EE module. The number of students participating in such programs is small. Following revisions of syllabi within the mainstream business subjects at senior cycle, there is now overt reference to EE as one of several core topics. Entrepreneurship is taught didactically rather than from an experiential perspective. The widespread use of simulation and other active learning interventions is still embryonic. EE programs should involve the acquisition of a broader set of life-long skills, and not simply training for business start-ups (Matlay, 2012; Korthagen, 2010; Birdthistle et al 2007). The success of entrepreneurship programs is very dependent on the level of commitment and the knowledge and skills base of the teacher (Birdthistle et al, 2007).

Regular issues surrounding the teaching of EE continue to be exercised:

- 1) The pedagogical issue, i.e. the balance between the didactic versus an experiential approach (Van Vuuren and Fearon, 2014).
- 2) The context issue, i.e. entrepreneurship can be social just as much as economic. (Birdthistle et al, 2013).
- 3) The boundary issue – is it better to teach it in a variety of cross disciplinary contexts rather than within a narrow business focus (Maritz et al, 2014).
- 4) The skills capacity issue, i.e. is it facilitated learning or expert led didactic delivery? (Gilbert, 2012).
- 5) The resource issue, i.e. In one survey over 80% of teachers thought the problem was a lack of resources to teach it (Birdthistle et al, 2007),
- 6) The definitional issue, i.e. Mwasalwiba (2010) noted that wide definitional variations exist making integration of EE learning problematic. The study found that critical factors for the success of EE is where a broad definition is adopted, thus allowing for the integration of EE learning across the educational experience.

Recent reform of the Junior Certificate school cycle reduces the number of public examination subjects to five. Five short courses which are to be internally conceptualised and constructed at school level are now also included. This offers new unique and unprecedented opportunities for EE curricular development. The onus now shifts to individual schools to respond to this new challenge in an innovative and creative way. It is envisaged that continuous professional development (CPD) inputs from the Department of Education and Skills will support staff efforts to meaningfully embrace a pedagogical vibrancy around EE.

2. Definitional issues

Gestalt is a psychotherapeutic approach to working with clients that seeks to foster growth through heightening awareness. In fact, the fundamental goal of gestalt is to increase awareness (Zinker, 2013). Gestalt is characterised by a philosophical orientation based on a

predominantly positive view of humanity, the assumption being that we ourselves have the greatest capacity to take charge of our own growth towards self-actualisation (Clarkson and Cavicchia, 2013). Such an ontological outlook is in marked contrast to other forms of therapeutic intervention, such as Freudian psychoanalysis. In the latter approach, the therapist, as expert, assumes and retains a directive stance, in which he diagnoses the client's malaise and prescribes a remedial course of action. In contrast, the gestalt practitioner creates a reflective space in which a relational encounter can occur, and through dialog and creative engagement, change naturally begins to happen (Corey, 2012).

A gestalt pedagogical approach is therefore based on the belief that students are by nature capable of both self-direction and creative auto-adjustment. Consequently learning is predominantly viewed as a self-regulating process, encompassing much more than that experienced in traditional classroom environments. Teaching from within a gestalt paradigm involves "*creativity, innovation, experience and experimentation*" (Woldt 2009, p. 135). Empirical evidence from various fields of professional training including health sciences verifies the efficacy of a gestalt approach due to its humanistic, holistic, and relational psychotherapeutic tenet. These characteristics align well with the values and interpersonal processes espoused as central to those sectors (Kelly and Howie, 2011; Wright, 2010).

Viewed from the perspective of gestalt pedagogy, learning involves the learners' whole being with self-determined boundaries and contacting processes appropriately applied in response to the field conditions. The EE pedagogue therefore is as much a facilitator as they are a teacher (Jones and Iredale, 2010). The gestalt paradigm posits that EE needs to transcend traditional pedagogical approaches by employing blended innovative methodologies. These interventions should actively promote the development of self-regulation and creative ability. Many writers have pointed to the need for such a holistic approach to EE pedagogy (Oganisjana and Matlay, 2012; Taatila, 2010; Neck and Greene, 2011). A gestalt pedagogical paradigm provides such balance.

3. Literature review

EE and National Competitive Advantage

Many economists increasingly refer to entrepreneurship as a fourth factor of production. Considerable time and resource is consequently being afforded now to the study and investigation of this phenomenon (Henrekson and Sanandaji, 2011; Szirmai, 2011; McQuaid, 2011). Modern discourse on entrepreneurship posits that it is arguably the most potent economic force the world has ever experienced (Kuratko, 2013; Cumming et al 2014).

The significance of entrepreneurship to national competitive advantage is emphasised in policy statements, initiatives and programmes across the world, with education seen as a key enabler for embedding it across the population (McKeown et al. 2006). In fact, EE is believed to have a close connection with the development of an entrepreneurial culture within a society due to its emphasis on the value of competitiveness, innovation and creativity (McKeever et al, 2015; Raposo and Do Paço, 2011). Contemporary empirical studies suggest a need to consider both the nature and conditions of learning in EE such as changing trends, globalisation, and sustainability concerns due to highly dynamic macro-environments characterised in the macro-environment (Matlay, 2009; Holt and MacPherson, 2010).

4. Gestalt and the gestalt pedagogical paradigm

The origins of gestalt therapeutic literature can be traced back to its foundation by Fritz Perls as a distinct school of therapeutic practice in its own right. The aim of gestalt "*is not merely to offer explanations of behaviour but to help us arrive at self-knowledge, satisfaction and self-support*" (Perls, 1973 p.7). In gestalt therapy, the client learns to fully use his internal and external senses so he can be self-responsible and self-supportive through a process of gaining heightened awareness (Clarkson and Cavicchia, 2013). Gestalt therapy uses several

experiential interventions to help achieve awareness through self-realization in the here-and-now (Yontef and Jacobs, 1989).

According to Jones et al, (2013), tangible and intangible learning is obtained best in programs that create awareness of the possibilities for self-employment, enterprising behavior, and enhanced personal skills. The homogeneity between EE and gestalt is evident in the in this predilection toward the experiential and active endeavour. Indeed, a gestalt pedagogical approach stimulates in the vibrancy of the here and now, an engagement with the subject matter, at a level *"that gives birth to ideas, new life, hope, and endless possibilities"* (Woldt, 2009 p. 101).

5. Gestalt: a holistic approach encouraging action learning

Despite evidence provided hitherto positing the need for experiential and novel approaches to EE pedagogy, recent evidence suggests a bias towards traditional classroom teaching and assessment methods (Draycott et al, 2011). Haase and Lautenschläger (2011) for example cite the continuation of didactic methods in isolation as inhibiting the acquisition of requisite enterprise attributes and skills. Gestalt looks at the totality of the individual and appreciates that growth is achieved through the integration of all aspects of our personality (Yontef, 2012). A gestalt approach to pedagogy therefore promotes a holistic appreciation of the totality of entrepreneurship, and, therefore, the myopic concentration of one approach over another can be avoided.

Action learning is an approach to solving real problems that involves taking action and reflecting upon the results. The learning that results helps improve the problem-solving process as well as the solutions the team develops. The action learning process includes (1) a real problem that is important, critical, and usually complex, (2) a diverse problem-solving team or "set", (3) a process that promotes curiosity, inquiry, and reflection, (4) a requirement that talk be converted into action and, ultimately, a solution, and (5) a commitment to learning (Leonard and Marquardt, 2010). EE tends to lend itself organically to action learning as the kind of objectives desired, such as the development of business skills, can often be realised by facilitating the experimentation and execution of an idea in a controlled environment, e.g. by facilitating simulation of business in a classroom setting, providing basic skills and information, how to start and run a small business and how to act as an entrepreneur as well as, determined new starters or nascent entrepreneurs (Solomon et al, 2010).

Dall'alba and Sandberg (1996) outlined a series of principles that embody action learning which manifested in the very successful Team Entrepreneurs Competition (TEC) in Hong Kong, a sustainable approach to EE that facilitates students in engaging in authentic learning practice, enabling conceptual learning, embracing real practice, and reflection on practice. This emphasis on participants, being the progenitors of their own emerging capacities in enterprise, is upheld by Yu and Man (2007) who see appropriate EE programmes as opportunities whereby the participants are active learning agents, working in teams, engaging in a real context and interacting with others and the environment authentically.

6. Gestalt: promoting a holistic pedagogical paradigm

According to the Budapest Agenda (European Commission, 2011), entrepreneurship is both a life-wide and life-long learning experience and, as such, the best way to learn is to combine experience with formal educational activities. Thus, a gestalt approach to enterprise pedagogy seeks to combine a theoretical understanding with experiential learning through active engagement in the form of experimentation etc. within a social constructivist ontology where the relational aspect is conducive to further growth in itself.

Entrepreneurial skills can be categorised as technical, business management and personal entrepreneurial skills (Kuratko, 2013). The first two are areas where didactic pedagogical skills

can significantly deliver. The third area, development of practical particular skills in control, risk taking, innovativeness, being change oriented, persistence and visionary leadership is what differentiates an entrepreneur from a manager. This is where the holistic thrust of gestalt can be transformational. This recognition of the need to blend the necessary didactic foundations of enterprise within an ontological framework that values the primacy of action learning for the budding entrepreneur, has been successfully embroidered into more recent innovations in EE, e.g. the TEC Hong Kong project.

7. Methodology

7.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was twofold. Firstly, it set out to evaluate what is an effective approach to the teaching of EE to a group of student teachers in an Irish university in their postgraduate teacher education course. Secondly, it strove to discover constitutes an effective teaching approach to EE.

8. Rationale for methodological choice

Silverman (2011) postulates the analogy of a kaleidoscope to describe the essence of qualitative research. He explains that a kaleidoscope is a child's toy consisting of a tube, a number of lenses and fragments of translucent, collared glass or plastic. When you turn the tube and look down the lens of the kaleidoscope, the shapes and colors, visible at the bottom, change. As the tube is turned, different lenses come into play and the combinations of color and shape shift from one pattern to another. In a similar way, Silverman argues that we can see social theory as a sort of kaleidoscope, where the rich interplay of reflective lenses and shapes of various phenomena create a constructed reality which is there for us to explore and to derive meaning from.

9. Action research

Action Research requires an ongoing commitment to practice improvement, through continuous cycles of action and reflection. (McNiff, 2013; Reason and Bradbury, 2013). It is entirely appropriate for groups of people within a school or college to undertake a collaborative action research project, exploring how best to change institutional practice (Bruce et al, 2011). The most emancipatory action research is collaborative in nature, involving groups of people exploring together, actively challenging the constraints of their professional lives (Locke et al, 2013; McNiff, 2013).

10. Qualitative data capture methods employed

Table 1 below outlines the data capture methods employed by the researchers along with the rationale for choosing same. The span of information captured for the study commenced at module design phase and continue to this day.

Table 1.
Data capture methods and rationale

Method	Rationale
Focus Groups	According to Latchem and Kitzinger (2012), focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants, in order to generate data. The benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into people's shared understandings of phenomena. (Bryman, 2012). Four focus groups were employed and the transcribed verbatim interviews analysed for emergent themes.
Reflective Journaling	Through 'Reflection', teachers construct the meanings and knowledge that guide their actions in the classroom (Schon,1983). As Larrivee (2008) argues, reflective practice moves teachers from their knowledge base of distinct skills, to a stage in their careers where they are able to modify their skills to suit specific contexts and situations, and eventually to invent new strategies. Throughout the module, and the subsequent analysis phase, both researchers maintained their own reflective journals which were analysed.
Critical Friend	To ensure good internal reliability (Bryman, 2012), the researchers' findings were validated by a senior academic from the same institution, within the university Education department, but not involved with the EE program.

11. Data analysis

According to Clarke and Braun (2013), thematic analysis offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. As phenomenological ethnographers, the researchers were interested in answering what Korthagen (2010) posits as the two central questions pertinent to the pedagogy of teacher education:

- (1) What are the essential qualities of a good teacher, and
- (2) How can we help people to become good teachers

As gestalts, they set about isolating from the data, effective pedagogical qualities, to build a more holistic view of a good EE teacher. Furthermore, they wanted to engage with their own journal reflections, those of their critical friend, and the outputs of the focus groups, to identify how best to improve their practice of EE within the time and budgetary constraints in which they operate.

12. Validity

This research paper adopts a qualitative approach. In qualitative data, Winter (2000) suggests that validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher. Cohen et al (2013) see the contrast of the qualitative with the positivism and specificity of quantitative methods. Inter-alia, they identify the following features as essential characteristics of qualitative research: the natural setting is the principal source of data; data is socially situated and socially and culturally saturated; the researcher is part of the researched world; the researcher rather than a research tool is the key instrument of research; there is a concern for processes rather than just outcomes; data is analyzed inductively rather than using a priori categories; seeing and reporting the situation through the eyes of the participants; respondent validation is crucial; and catching meaning and intention are essential. Layers of rigor have been added by parallel engagement with reflective journaling, the thematic reflections of the student focus groups and engagement with a critical friend.

The inclusion of critical friends in action research is often considered as providing a methodological warrant for the trustworthiness of the data and operating the study (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). The authors chose a senior academic working within the same department but removed from the EE program. The rationale for choosing this particular academic as critical friend was due to her extensive endeavours in the field of educational qualitative research. Validation from the critical friend was conducted in accordance with guidelines from McNiff and Whitehead (2011) and commenced at the beginning of the design phase of the study and continued throughout.

The choice of employing a critical friend for validation and trustworthiness is particularly pertinent in gestalt, especially contemporary gestalt practice, due to its emphasis on the importance of dialog (Corey, 2012). Reflecting on the impact of the critical friend, the authors believe that significant trustworthiness was fostered through her assiduous approach to challenging bias, pre-conceptions, especially in the interpretation of journals and focus group findings. She also, they believe, corroborated with the methodological choices as being the most appropriate for the study.

13. Ethics

The research involved in this study engaged fifty postgraduate students in the age range of twenty-two to forty-eight. As there was a multi-tiered approach adopted involving action research, phenomenological review, focus groups and thematic analysis, the principle of 'informed consent' was paramount to its efficacy. Diener and Crandall (1978:57) define informed consent as "*the procedures to which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions*". For the purpose of populating the focus groups, an open letter was sent to all members of the postgraduate business education class explaining the nature and purpose of the research and what was involved. Clarification of all aspects of the project was offered. Volunteers were invited to submit their names for participation in the focus groups. Each group consisted of eight student teachers. All documentation surrounding the project was attached to the letter. Participants in the focus groups signed the 'Consent Form' for participation. No names of participants were recorded on any of the transcripts of any of the focus groups.

14. Findings

14.1 Thematic analysis: focus groups

Four key themes were identified from the thematic analysis of the focus group interviews. These were: (a) the power of creative intervention; (b) evidential preference for experiential learning; (c) the need for reflexivity in practice; and (d) how the didactic didn't work.

Given the constraints of time and budgets in operating this course, it had to be delivered over a twelve week period. Although the student teacher feedback was critical of a lack of practical application, they did however acknowledge several dynamics that they attribute as being important to the effective teaching of EE. Several references were made to the experiential and creative empowerment that a gestalt approach offers the teacher

In this enterprise course, it was important to cultivate the personal dynamic to drive the enterprising spirit. This was channeled by the gestalt approach in getting class members to vibrantly engage with the class through public speaking, thus facilitating their entry into a dialoguing world.

"It makes you nervous and you ultimately overcome it. It makes you stronger and more resilient as a speaker. That is to be expected of a course like this."

"All of us had something to say about our lives that struck a chord...there are certain things we share that makes me more empathetic to other people on the course."

The input through simulation exercises, individual and organisation case studies generated high positivity. By engaging with real life successes and failures of both individuals and organisations, students were able to create a schematic visualisation of the subject matter to hand.

"the use of case studies..... highlighted many important aspects in relation to entrepreneurship such as experiencing failure and personal problems and showing the power, belief and commitment in setting goals."

A key aim of the gestalt approach is that through continuous self-reflection one can achieve empathy with one's students. It was evident that many students were overwhelmed with the level of information provided. Consequently, they found it difficult to create a schema in their own minds, a mental map of how to go forward and be effective teachers of entrepreneurship themselves. This is the essence of the gestalt paradoxical theory of change that when we attempt to drive too much change, it can become counter-productive (Yontef, 2012).

"We all got freaked out for want of a better word....it was hard to make it relevant considering that we had done very little teaching practice on stuff we had never done before....if you try and think about it."

There was a lot of negativity regarding the level of information dissemination attempted on the course. This led to students losing focus. It was at variance with the gestalt philosophical goals of the program. At this point, the boundary between lecturer and student unfortunately grew and, overall, the dynamic of the class suffered at this point.

"It was theory heavy. There was an insufficient practical approach."

"If he had talked to us what it was about, we would have been more engaged."

15. Thematic analysis

15.1. Reflective journaling

The researchers maintained their individual journals throughout the process from module design, to the analysis phase, and they continue to do so, as ongoing reflective practitioners. When discussing their own themes, a shared vision of an appropriate pedagogical approach to EE tentatively began to emerge and grew in strength as the dialog continued.

15.2. Key theme: the construct a holistic model

The researchers both posit a two-layered approach to the pedagogy of EE. Perls (1973) uses the analogy of the onion to describe the phenomenology of all experience, where the whole can be deconstructed into its individual layers. This relates to the science versus art tension postulated by Jack and Anderson (1999). The science layer, which involves the business and management functional skills appears to be teachable using a conventional pedagogical approach. However, the art part, which relates to the creative and innovative attributes of entrepreneurship, does not appear to be teachable in the same way (Henry et al, 2005 p.164).

15.3. The foundational layer

As outlined in the findings from the focus groups, students reported an expectation on commencing the module that they would be taught a syllabus, a roadmap so to speak for them to follow with their own students. The authors acknowledge that this was absent from the programme and, going forward, would be included as evidenced in the literature (Hisrich and

Peters, 1992). It is at this stage also, that the module assessment can be clearly outlined and subsequently attended to. By introducing this foundational layer, students' lower level, security needs (Maslow 1970) can be met. It is upon this secure platform that the next layer can now be constructed.

15.4. The transformational layer

The transformational layer, which is grounded in the creative and innovative attributes of entrepreneurship that Henry et al (2005) speak of, is where the essence of gestalt creativity becomes figural. In reflecting on the module, and in particular, on the outputs of the focus groups, deep and rich learning was achieved through the experiential components of the programme. This correlates with key evidence in the literature (Korthagen, 2010) and (Birdthistle et al, 2007).

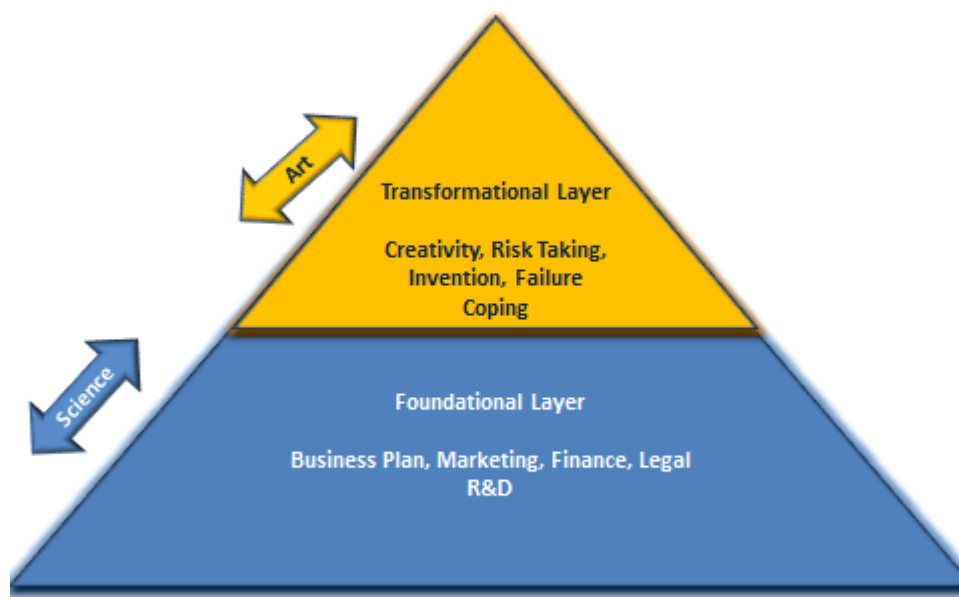


Figure 1. Two Layered Pedagogical EE Model

16. Discussion

16.1 Teacher education

The heavy laden subject-focused public exam system in Ireland places a dichotomy of emphasis upon the teacher educator. On the one hand, a teacher will subscribe to the holistic educational philosophy of most schools that is embedded in school mission statements and national curricula and, on the other hand, the individual teacher is susceptible to the relentless pressures for high grades from multiple sources. These pressures are significant, as exam results determine a points ranking for entry into further and higher education. Invariably, the tension between a utilitarian, didactic approach to amassing high grades conflicts with a holistic philosophy that embraces learning for a range of ends. This marks the difference between the teaching of the mainstream business subjects, business, accounting and economics and the non-exam EE.

Colleges of Teacher Education for second level schools confer high priority to the pedagogy of the mainstream business subjects but their treatment of EE fluctuates. This is reflected in the

focus groups who contributed to this study. The expectations of the cohort were very much captured in the following statements:

“More like Business and Accounting pedagogy modules and how to deliver it.”

“How we would be teaching EE in school because that’s what a lot of our pedagogy was about.”

The act of teaching EE being seen as something ‘out there’, objectivized as opposed to something ‘in here’ subjectivized represents the tension between the didactic and the holistic (a fusion of didactic elements, enhancement and persona development). Unwittingly, this mirrored the debate as to whether enterprise can be taught. The gestalt approach adopted, cultivating the disposition to agency and creativity, challenged the understandable reliance on default thinking that enterprise can be taught like anything else. More importantly, it challenged student teacher embedded assumptions that EE can be taught didactically only. Striking a balance between ‘coach’ and ‘teacher’ is critical to supporting active learning methods. The effective enterprise teacher is a facilitator who offers a supportive feedback mechanism to foster appropriation of enterprising characteristics (Jones and Iredale, 2010). It is the dialoging orbit of the gestalt relational framework where these overt and latent capacities of individual student teachers can be harnessed through active learning methods supporting them through monitoring and feedback.

17. Awareness: a key goal of the transformational layer

Entrepreneurs have the ability to view situations from a unique perspective. Although presented with the same phenomenon as other people, they exercise a capacity and freedom to interpret from within their own unique perspective. According to the existentialist and holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl (1964), though we cannot always choose the situations we find ourselves in, we always retain the freedom to choose how we act in every situation.

To illustrate entrepreneurial manifestations of this philosophy, the authors regularly offer real life examples such as the following. In a time of economic downturn in Ireland, how did a primary school teacher, Pdraig O’Ceidigh, with no airline experience, look at failing regional airline, Aer Arann, buy it, and turn it into a highly profitable international venture? The reason is he saw the potential that others didn’t, and in doing so, he envisioned himself bringing success to the operation. He consciously ignored the detractors who claimed that one, devoid of industry experience could possibly succeed, in such a difficult industry. He proved them wrong. In doing so, he risked everything, turning his back on a steady, pensionable career. He had the moral courage to re-mortgage his home twice, to fashion his dream into a reality. O’Ceidigh has a social-constructivist ontology, a worldview that directly challenges the positivist notion of the fixed nature of reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). It is from within the social-constructivist paradigm, that the transformational layer of the researchers’ programme is built.

18. Mission statement

As gestalts, the authors’ fundamental aim is to promote learning and growth, by creating the correct environment in which this can happen. As gestalts also, they believe that by improving awareness and self-regulation, change automatically begins to happen (Corey, 2012). Polster and Polster (2013) explain through a three stage integration sequence model, how growth through awareness occurs. The first part of this sequence consists of discovery, where we are introduced to new concepts or new ways of looking at the same phenomena. The second stage of the integration sequence is accommodation, which involves engaging with this new information, and recognising that we have choices in how we treat it. The third stage of the integration sequence is assimilation, which involves learning how to influence our environment through this new learning.

Through creative interventions such as case study and role play, the authors open up a discourse which is in marked contrast to the scientific, taught element of the program. Students are asked to question, and to avoid introjection: the swallowing whole of a positivist fixed view of life and reality (Yontef, 2012). A recurring theme of both focus groups reported how key insights and learning was achieved through participation in such a dynamic environment.

19. Conclusion

A gestalt pedagogical approach is based on Perl's proclamation that we exist in a permanent state of low grade vitality largely unaware of our true creative potential. Society teaches us "that the time for fun, for pleasure, for growing and learning, is childhood and youth" (Perls, 1973 p.8). We abdicate this vitality on reaching maturity within the confines of highly regulated and rule driven society. Traditionally in Ireland, any deviances from expected norms of behavior have been actively discouraged. No place has this been more evident in the traditional disposition of EE within a rote learning dominated exam centred education system. Entrepreneurship however is about disruption (Heywood, 2014). It is about challenging the status quo to find something new. Entrepreneurship is creative thinking that modifies or rejects previously accepted ideas to build innovations from practically anything. It challenges existing businesses by creating new structures and destroying organisations that refuse to change (Engle et al, 2010). Traditional didactic forms of pedagogy have thus been rejected by contemporary theorists and practitioners as been in fact detrimental to the pedagogy of EE.

This paper has focused as much on the content as much as the process of EE. It has addressed the traditional art versus science debate where entrepreneurship is seen as somewhat of an enigma involving both art and science where the science of business and management functional skills, have been proposed as suitable to conventional methods but where the art concept including the creative and innovative aspects of entrepreneurship did not appear to be teachable in the same way (Jack and Anderson, 1999). This paper agrees that any EE program devoid of either the art or science constructs would be unbalanced. By reflecting on their practice of EE pedagogy from within a gestalt paradigm, this unbalance became wholly evident following the first delivery of the module. Gestalt posits the integration of all aspects of the holistic reality of the organism (Corey, 2012). There was an undue bias towards the creative in module one explainable perhaps by a well meaning but ill advised attempt to force change. Gestalts actually call this the paradoxical theory of change where the more we attempt to force same, the less change we achieve (Yontef, 2012).

The authors disagree with Jack and Anderson's demarcation of teaching methods classifying various elements into traditional versus creative. Instead, the authors were able to create an interactive two-layered model of EE. The transactional layer consists of the more functional elements of business management such as finance, legal considerations etc. The transformational layers consisting of the more creative attribution elements of the entrepreneur. Gestalt is concerned with awareness in the here and now, with the process of lived experience (Clarkson and Cavicchia, 2013). Therefore, the program entails active engagement and reflection throughout resulting in student reports of an experience totaling something much more than the summation of its individual parts.

As reflective practitioners, the authors continuously engage in action research as a mode of on-going self-enquiry, to ensure all practice improvement opportunities are identified. This current cycle of reflection involved a multi-tiered investigation that drew on the thematic evaluation of their respective journals, the thematic evaluation of student teacher focus groups, and the validation of design, methodology and findings of a critical friend.

Four key themes emerged from the focus groups which were considered in alignment with the insights from the reflective journals. This resulted in one overarching conclusion that effective EE pedagogy is a two-layered construct. There is a foundational layer which can encompass a traditional pedagogical approach and a transformational layer requiring an experiential and creative approach. The authors assert that this study itself demonstrates the transformational

power for change in education through gestalt, by the impact on the future design of their program from the process of constructive dialog.

20. References

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