

What's distinctive about Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Education? - threshold concepts and expertise

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Abstract:

With the ever growing fashion for all things entrepreneurial, we are perhaps in danger of over using the term and rendering the word's meaning to be so all-encompassing as to become nothing but a trendy label. Is it time to get clearer about what we really mean when we educate in entrepreneurship? How can we differentiate entrepreneurship manifest in the HE sector in any subject discipline from entrepreneurship as a subject discipline? Recent work (Lackéus, 2015) promoting value creation as an educational philosophy grounded in entrepreneurship would suggest that an entrepreneurial approach may be taken to teaching and learning in *any* subject discipline in an educational context. Where does that leave HE programmes claiming to teach entrepreneurship? What implications does this have for the curricula of such programmes? Using the theory of *threshold concepts* and the concept of *expertise* as bridges between the domains of education and entrepreneurship; this workshop aims to explore the distinctiveness of specialist entrepreneurship programmes, more general Business programmes and other type of HE programmes, using the visual research method of triad comparison. Participants will leave this workshop with a clearer understanding of the potentially unique differentiating characteristics of specialist entrepreneurship programmes, enabling better curricula design and delivery, as well as the improved marketing of such programmes.

Overview and Key Questions:

Entrepreneur, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial are becoming fairly ubiquitous terms in the Higher Education sector with evolving and conflicted meanings for both University management and academics. This workshop has been designed to explore understandings of the distinctiveness of entrepreneurship in order to develop a clearer identity for the programmes in Higher Education that purport to specialise in this subject. It is intended that this will be beneficial both for those responsible for programmes specialising in entrepreneurship, and for those responsible for more general Business Management and Business Studies programmes which do not.

Key questions to be investigated are:

- How are programmes with entrepreneurship at their core distinct from general business programmes, and indeed from all other HE undergraduate programmes?
- What are the most important and distinctive concepts of programmes with entrepreneurship at their core? What may be the likely threshold concepts of entrepreneurship education?

By clarifying the distinctiveness of programmes specialising in entrepreneurship, attendees will be able to apply this newly-made explicit knowledge to enhance curricula design and delivery of their programmes, and be able to develop clearer marketing campaigns for such programmes, improving their communication to prospective candidates.

Delegates will be invited in small groups to complete a triad comparison, or odd-one-out exercise. Given three different types of undergraduate degree in Higher Education, participants will tease out the similarities and differences between them. The triad comparison method proposed is a robust knowledge elicitation technique which produces representations of domain concepts, and encourages the elicitation of attributes that are central to distinctions within the domain (Cooke, 1994).

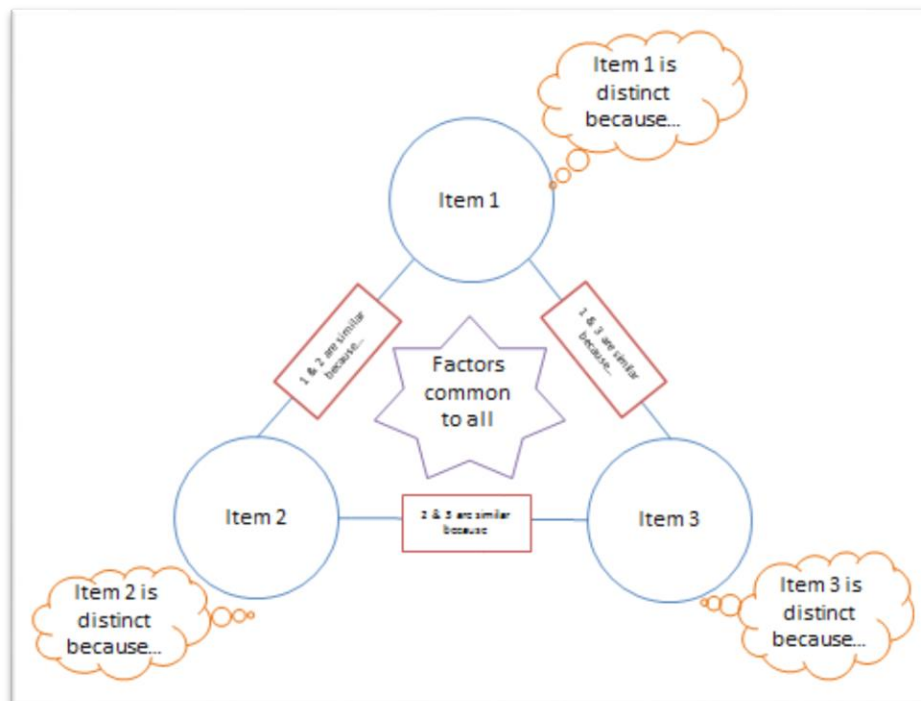


Figure 1 *Sample Triad Comparison Template*

This workshop forms a part of doctoral research data in entrepreneurship education through the lens of threshold concepts. Individual consent will be sought from attendees of this workshop. No

individual will be identifiable from their contributions and all data will be anonymised. Workshop attendees who do not wish to consent to participate in this research will be in no way disadvantaged. Consenting participants are free to withdraw their consent at any time. To this end, participants will be asked if a photograph may be taken of their completed templates at the end of the workshop, an audio recording of the workshop will be made, and field notes will be taken to provide additional context to the data recorded on the templates. Ethical approval of this research has been granted by Northumbria University.

Reviewers indicated the proposal for this workshop gave answers to new and interesting questions very well (6.5/7) and developed new and interesting questions very well (6/7). They felt the question was very important (7/7) and would love to see it presented (7/7). “Without doubt, this proposal is on a very interesting and highly relevant topic by addressing fundamental questions by using an interesting pedagogical method.” (Reviewer 1). “The underpinning philosophies will be of interest to a wide range of conference participants.” (Reviewer 2).

Activities and Outcomes

The workshop will be structured as follows:

Introduction (5m): The objectives of the workshop and of the participants, the key questions under investigation, possible alternative applications of the knowledge elicitation technique, and ethical considerations.

Activity (15m): Guided individual completion of handouts, small group discussion to share choices and rationale, further annotation of templates by participants.

Discussion (15m): Facilitated large group discussion around the question, “What are the most important and distinctive concepts of programmes with entrepreneurship at their core?”

Close (5m)

The style of the workshop will be informal, interactive and participant led. It has been designed for almost exclusive participation and delegate involvement with only a very brief introduction. It is centred on the completion, by individual participants, of a template for triad comparison, and the ensuing discussions in firstly small groups, and subsequently in the large group, stimulated by thoughts resulting from the structured process of template completion. In preparation for this workshop, participants might wish to consider the ways in which programmes which specialise in entrepreneurship with which they are familiar are distinctive.

Visual research methods and conceptual techniques of knowledge elicitation may not be familiar to participants who may consequently find them of interest and applicable in many contexts where a dyad-comparison approach is unsatisfactory. Participants may also achieve greater clarity on the distinctiveness of entrepreneurship programmes, and their most important concepts, which will enable better curricula design and delivery, as well as enabling the improved marketing of such programmes. Participants will also explore the design of the curriculum of entrepreneurship programmes, as distinct from approaches treating entrepreneurship as an underpinning educational philosophy with wider disciplinary applications.

Threshold concepts are defined as concepts which open up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something (Meyer and Land, 2003). One of the strengths of the notion of threshold concepts is how effective it is in engaging academics in discipline-specific conversations about teaching, the expectation being that the identification of these threshold concepts will allow more effective curricula design. However it has been criticised for lacking a fully fledged research methodology (Quinlan et al., 2013). This workshop constitutes exploratory research in preparation for a transactional curriculum inquiry study using a staged design, to identify perceptions of the concepts in entrepreneurship education which are transformative for student learning in HE, and how this knowledge might be used to optimise the effectiveness of such programmes.

It is hoped that this workshop will form the first step in establishing a community of interest around the distinctiveness of specialist entrepreneurship programmes, and the threshold concepts in entrepreneurship education. Participants will take their completed triad comparisons away with them from the session and a group summary will be distributed following the workshop, and published on-line in the author's blog.

References

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