

SUMMARY

ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE MICRO-DYNAMICS OF LEARNING IN STUDENT BUSINESS INCUBATORS

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In contribution to the literature on learning entrepreneurship through practice (Neck and Greene, 2011), in this study we conduct an ethnography of a student enterprise incubator. The latter combines aspects of practice-based learning with physical proximity to peers and mentors. Following nine months of observations, interviews, archival documents collection (email, Facebook pages) and participation to the activities of the incubator, we can report on the micro-dynamics in this environment. Our insights reveals that students peer-learning in the very early stages of the entrepreneurial process (idea exploration and feasibility studies) is underpinned by (a) unplanned interactions facilitated by (a1) close physical proximity as well as (1b) the perception of commonalities that do not lead to direct competition, as well as (2) a shared, newly acquired entrepreneurial identity facilitated by the symbolism and discourse that characterizes the environment (awards, photographs of individuals, etc.). Whilst the aforementioned interactions and the resulting mutually beneficial exchanges create a culture of generosity and mutual support, drawbacks are observed in the form of identity-focused behavior, whereby students become sidetracked by protecting their “entrepreneur” status and stop experimenting with their entrepreneurial journey, thus not progressing on their learning on the same. Overcoming the entrepreneurial-identity focus is key for continuous learning to occur for students in the business incubator. Students who overcome the latter develop an understanding that sustained entrepreneurial efforts can only be achieved through learning from setbacks. Over time and through repeated exposure to each-other’s failures as well as successes, a culture of *effortful practice* replaces the focus on *entrepreneurial identity*. It is this duality of effortful practice versus entrepreneurial identity that underpins continuous learning in the student business incubator.

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