

Supporting Students and Society: Underpinning entrepreneurship education with a humanistic philosophy

Robin Bell r.bell@worc.ac.uk

University of Worcester, Worcester Business School, Worcester, UK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7325-4277>

Abstract

Whilst there has been a rapid expansion and proliferation in the delivery of entrepreneurship education globally, the literature suggests that entrepreneurship educators are not always well versed in educational theory and philosophy. This can lead to a degree of separation between the practice of entrepreneurship education and educational science, which underpins the delivery of entrepreneurship education. Existing literature has proposed the need for a range of educational philosophies and theories to be integrated to ensure the effective delivery of entrepreneurship education within higher education. Entrepreneurship education delivered within higher education needs to meet the needs of students, higher education institutions and stakeholders. This chapter theorises and espouses how underpinning entrepreneurship education with a humanistic philosophy can help meet these needs and support students and society's development. Humanism can be combined with other underpinning philosophies of education to support the development of essential entrepreneurial competencies and learning in relation to individuals' own interests and contexts. Through interaction between students and their community, students can develop networks, value-orientated skills, make integrative judgements and gain an understanding of the importance of compassion within entrepreneurship. Through such engagement and interaction, students can follow their interests, in a liberating learning environment which supports self-actualisation.

Keywords

Entrepreneurial pedagogy; Educational philosophy; Educational theory; Humanism; Sustainable entrepreneurship; Social entrepreneurship

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The Role of Philosophy in Education

There has been a rapid rise in entrepreneurship education programs' availability in the last two decades (Fayolle, 2013; Neck and Greene, 2011). To support effective entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurship teaching should be based on solid foundations, which are both theoretically and methodologically robust (Pittaway and Cope, 2007). However, it has been suggested that entrepreneurship educators are often not supported in developing their pedagogic practices (Lackéus et al. 2016; Neck and Corbett 2018), despite previous research identifying that the pedagogical understanding and competence of educators influence the quality of teaching and learning in higher education (HE) (Kaynardağ, 2019). Many academics and higher education institutions (HEIs) still believe teaching undergraduates requires no formal educational training (Stewart, 2014). This has left some entrepreneurship educators having only received limited pedagogical training and support, and only a partial understanding of the educational theories and philosophies underpinning their practice (Bell, 2021). As entrepreneurship education is a discipline which is still developing and evolving, it has been suggested that the practice of entrepreneurship education has moved ahead of its scholarship (Morris and Liguori, 2016). Despite education scholarship and research having a long and established history, there remains a degree of separation between educational science literature and entrepreneurship education practice (Fayolle, 2013). Thus, the potential exists for educational science to be leveraged to inform entrepreneurship education practice.

It has been highlighted that educators bring their personal values and beliefs into the classroom, influencing what and how they teach (Peters, 1959; Zappe et al., 2013). Wraae and Walmsley (2020) emphasise that entrepreneurship educators can shape the entrepreneurship education landscape. One way of doing this is through the educational philosophy that the educator chooses to inform and underpin their teaching practice. The educational philosophy chosen shapes the educators' thinking, behaviour and action, based on a set of underpinning values and beliefs. It supports educators' understanding of what they are doing and for what purpose (Merriam, 1982). Whilst educators might not always be able to convey and verbalise their underpinning philosophy, they will have an underpinning philosophy directing and driving their practice (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982), which will

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have implications on what they teach, how they teach it, how knowledge and experience are valued and what form of assessment will be adopted (Bell, 2021). Increased knowledge and comprehension of educational philosophies can help educators more effectively understand how and why they teach in a particular way (Hannon, 2006). For educators to maximise their teaching effectiveness, they should understand and grasp the philosophies and theories that underpin their practice (Bell and Bell, 2020), a circumstance that Fayolle et al. (2016) suggested is not always the case. However, it has been suggested that there is increasing awareness of the importance of educational theory underpinning entrepreneurial learning (Kakouris and Morselli, 2020). Bechard and Gregoire (2005) propose that for effective entrepreneurship education, educators need balance in both entrepreneurship and education principles and perspectives in their teaching methods.

Behaviourism and constructivism are commonly seen as opposing educational philosophies and are commonly used to underpin educational practice in HE (Bélanger, 2011). However, Jones (2019) suggests that there is no widely accepted concise philosophy of entrepreneurship education, and other scholars have suggested a range of philosophies and theories should be adopted to support successful entrepreneurship education (Bell and Bell, 2020; Ramsgaard, 2018; Robinson et al., 2016). This chapter explores and presents the case for a humanistic approach to be included within entrepreneurship education. The next section will briefly discuss the philosophies of behaviourism and constructivism and their key principles, before discussing the principles of humanism and the benefits it can provide to entrepreneurship education. The chapter will conclude by discussing how a humanism philosophy can be applied in the entrepreneurship education classroom.

Behaviourism and Constructivism

Behaviourism has often been coined as the philosophy which underpins traditional teaching, often in the form of lectures, where the students are passive receivers of knowledge. Within this paradigm, students are passive receivers in the didactic transmission of objectivist knowledge from the educator. From an objectivist standpoint, the knowledge taught and understood can be used and transferred into new situations. Within such a teaching approach, students bank knowledge presented to them by the educator (Freire, 2006). Such

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an approach can be devoid of context and offers only limited opportunity for students to apply their own context and experience to the learning. The educator delivers knowledge that they perceive as important for the learner to have, hoping that it will change their future behaviour. Therefore, the educator needs to manage, direct and predict students learning to ensure set objectives are achieved (Hannon, 2006). Behaviourism is commonly used to underpin entrepreneurship education, or at least elements of it, although its usefulness in isolation to prepare students for entrepreneurship is increasingly considered as ineffective (Gedeon, 2014). Whilst Wraae and Walmsley (2020) opined that there was widespread agreement amongst entrepreneurship educators that entrepreneurship education needs to be tied to practice, it has been highlighted that objectivist knowledge is still required to ensure students understand the course objectives (Bécharde and Toulouse, 1998). It is essential for students to have a solid understanding of the basic theory and frameworks of entrepreneurship, to allow them to effectively learn from experience (Bell and Bell, 2020; Peltier and Scovotti, 2010).

It has been observed that entrepreneurship educators believe that it is important to teach students beyond just subject knowledge (Wraae and Walmsley, 2020). This is underpinned by an extensive body of research which has found experience to be valuable for developing students' entrepreneurial behaviours in a range of contexts. Such experiential approaches to learning can be underpinned by a constructivist educational philosophy, which posits knowledge lies in the individual and that learners should create their own meaning from knowledge in relation to their individual context and experience (Mueller and Anderson, 2014). Therefore, knowledge construction is an active and interpretive process, where meaning-making is dependent on past and present knowledge and experience (Merriam et al., 2007). Experiential learning methods have been proposed to be efficacious for entrepreneurship education as they support the development of entrepreneurial action by using situationally and context specific activities and experiences (Bell, 2015; Mueller and Anderson, 2014). As entrepreneurs face dynamic, ever-changing environments, experiential approaches help develop the skills entrepreneurs require in the fast-changing environments that entrepreneurs face (Balan and Metcalfe, 2012; Kyrö, 2015).

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Humanism and Entrepreneurship Education

No consensus exists within the literature for a definition of humanistic education and what it entails, however, more consensus prevails as to what humanistic learning environments should focus on and include. Veugelers (2011) opines that a humanist educational approach should focus on the development of rationality, empowerment, autonomy, creativity, affections and a concern for humanity. Humanistic education should seek to develop the whole learner, including their intellectual, socioemotional and physical development (Aloni, 2002). Humanism places the learner's autonomy and dignity centrally within the learning process and therefore emphasise the learner's personal choice and commitment to their development through education (Billings and Halstead, 2019). Humanism resembles constructivism in that it focuses on active-learning and experience, which have been argued to be key to the development of entrepreneurs (Jones and Iredale, 2010). Both humanism and constructivism appreciate the subjectivity of knowledge and the need for it to be learnt in context, but humanism places greater emphasis on the development of the learner's integrative judgement and the acquiring of value-oriented skills. The tenets of humanism will now be considered, and an argument presented as to how they can be aligned to entrepreneurship education and the development of entrepreneurs and broader society.

A central tenet within humanism is compassion, which can be demonstrated through interaction with individuals and broader society. Increasingly, HEIs seek to positively influence the communities with which they engage and interact and seek to encourage and develop learners to act in a morally sustainable manner in their future graduate endeavours (Dierksmeier, 2020). The application of humanism to underpin entrepreneurship education teaching and learning can support the objectives of HEIs, by encouraging future entrepreneurs to think more holistically about their communities and stakeholders and the promotion of positive engagement and interactions with these groups. An increased focus in the entrepreneurship education classroom on the human side of economic agency and the creation of value through entrepreneurship could help frame entrepreneurship in a more sustainable and compassionate manner. Such an approach in the classroom supports the principle within humanism of promoting social development (Leach, 2018). There is increasing growth and recognition for the need for sustainable and humane

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entrepreneurship. It has been posited that humane entrepreneurship can drive sustainable wealth and job creation (Kim et al., 2017). Compassion is a value central to the concepts of humane entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship and eco-preneurship, which are increasingly becoming prominent and important in society. Previous research has suggested that more socially focused entrepreneurs have different traits to traditional entrepreneurs (Smith et al., 2014) and thus entrepreneurship education would benefit from being tailored to support entrepreneurship education for social entrepreneurship. A humanistic approach and bringing compassion as a value into the entrepreneurship education classroom can help learners link the concepts to not only traditional entrepreneurial ventures, but to other more societal mission-focused ventures.

A critical movement is developing, which seeks to situate entrepreneurship education outside the neoliberal paradigm which is focused on the generation of profit (e.g., Berglund & Verduyn, 2018; Lackéus, 2017). The concept of entrepreneurship education being solely focused on profit generation and maximisation does not always fit comfortably within HE and those educators who are commonly focused on social value and outcomes. This is particularly true in some contexts where a focus on venture creation and profit maximisation do not sit in harmony with educators and institutions' goals and objectives. Entrepreneurship education delivered by educators in other subject disciplines outside of business, in less capitalistic societies and schools, might be less comfortable promoting the neoliberal principles and profit maximisation commonly associated with entrepreneurship. The application of a humanistic philosophy to underpin and inform the delivery of entrepreneurship education in such contexts can provide a more relaxed and effective fit to the goals and objectives sought to be achieved through the teaching. Such an approach could help solve the bias within entrepreneurship education towards business activity rather than an educational pursuit for the learner, which has limited the applicability of entrepreneurship education to wider contexts (Ratten and Jones, 2020).

The increasing emphasis for entrepreneurship to consider its impact on local communities and moving beyond focusing solely on profit has led to the relationship between entrepreneurship education and neoliberalism and profit maximisation to be questioned. Underpinning entrepreneurship education with a humanistic philosophy can encourage the

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students to bring compassion and values into their entrepreneurial decision making and actions. Having considered how the axiological position and focus on compassion within humanism can be used to support and underpin entrepreneurship education, the focus of learning within a humanistic learning environment and how it can be leveraged to support effective entrepreneurship education will now be discussed.

The Focus of Learning within Humanism

Using humanism refocuses how and what learners should learn. A humanistic underpinning promotes learning that develops attitudes and skills that will benefit society (Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011; Hesselbarth and Schaltegger, 2014; Greenberg, 2015). As argued by Laasch and Moosmayer (2015), humanism transitions learning from being of competences to for competence that can be used outside the classroom.

Within the humanism philosophical paradigm, educators seek to maximise the personal growth of the learner. Santos et al. (2019) viewed entrepreneurship education as potentially being emancipatory and empowering. Entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurialism have been found to support the growth and employability of students and graduates, and it has been suggested that there is good reason to link entrepreneurship with employability, career growth, and development (Bell, 2016; Rae, 2007). The potential within entrepreneurship education to develop future entrepreneurs and support students' development and future careers is well aligned with the humanistic paradigm's desire to support the growth and future development of learners.

Learning within the humanistic philosophy is viewed as an act of fulfilment to achieve developmental needs and to support potential self-actualisation. Therefore, there is an assumption that learners are seeking self-actualisation through concentrating on their own personal development and growth (Elias and Merriam, 1995; Leach, 2018). Entrepreneurship education is provided across a range of levels using a variety of methods and practices. These can include teacher led pedagogic practices, andragogic self-directed learning practices and heutagogical approaches which encourage students to find their own challenges and questions to answer. A humanistic approach to entrepreneurship education fits neatly with a heutagogical approach to learning, where rather than being assigned tasks by the educator,

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students can seek out their own areas to explore, review and question in relation to their own interests. However, humanism can still be used to support and underpin more directed pedagogic and andragogic approaches, where the educator still leaves room for learners to have some say in the direction of their study and learning supported by the scaffolding provided in such approaches. In some contexts, the learner is likely to need a degree of scaffolding and direction to lay the foundation for entrepreneurship education. However, the focus of interest in terms of enterprise and entrepreneurship can still be left open. Even in introductory entrepreneurship education classes, the basic theory is often taught, whilst also providing room and opportunity for students to apply the theory by developing their own entrepreneurial ideas, allowing scope for students to direct their learning to some degree.

In order to support the development and self-actualisation of learners, humanism seeks to create liberating learning environments. Liberating learning environments can be a powerful motivator for student learning and can encourage and support social change (Rincón-Gallardo, 2019). A facet within effective entrepreneurship is innovation and the requirement to develop something of value, which is new and novel. Liberating learning environments can help achieve this by encouraging students to think of, and develop, new ideas in a safe space. Creativity and innovation can be challenging concepts and skills to teach and instil within students. However, liberating learning environments can support the teaching of creativity and innovation by supporting students to break free from existing thinking, solutions and offerings already in the marketplace and develop their own new and novel ideas and solutions to problems. To achieve this, the educator acts as a facilitator encouraging students to solve problems within a liberating environment focused on development and change (Merriam et al., 2007).

Humanism encourages and promotes the learner to direct their own learning to maximise their own personal growth (Morris, 2019). It is posited that such a focus can support learners to learn how to learn, preparing them to effectively handle future challenges (Rogers, 1969). Such learning and skills have been identified as an essential resource for entrepreneurs (Ferreira, 2020). As there is no single entrepreneurial opportunity that will resonate with all potential entrepreneurs, students need to be given space and room to explore entrepreneurship related to their own experiences, abilities and context. Students need to

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follow their own interests and passion to find entrepreneurial opportunities that align with their individual context and abilities. Developing positive emotions within learning has been posited as being important to support the effective learning process (Lackéus, 2014; Loon and Bell, 2016). A humanistic learning environment can effectively support students to explore entrepreneurialism and entrepreneurial opportunities in relation to their development and individual context.

The above paragraphs have presented how humanism can be applied to inform an entrepreneurship education learning environment to support the development of entrepreneurial students. The next section will explore and put forward a case as to how a humanistic educational philosophy can support the development of skills essential for effective entrepreneurship.

The Potential for Humanistic Learning Environments to Develop Essential Entrepreneurial Skills

Learning approaches rooted in learning from experience, such as constructivism, have been posited as being particularly effective for entrepreneurship education (Kyrö, 2015). Whilst humanism similarly promotes learning through experience and doing, it has additional embedded values which support the development of skills useful for entrepreneurship.

Humanism seeks to develop autonomous learners, who are capable and enthusiastic to learn, to learn from their experiences. Within entrepreneurship there is a need to continue to learn and reflect from experiences. Such learning can help entrepreneurs develop and pivot their offerings in the face of developing markets and competition to be sustainable in the longer term. To develop effective and sustainable entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship education needs to ensure that it develops autonomous learners, who are willing and able to continue to learn independently.

Effective entrepreneurship requires ongoing decision making and risk management. Such skills can be supported in the entrepreneurship education classroom through the de-emphasis of knowledge and rote memorisation in favour of the development and acquisition of value-orientated skills and integrative judgements (Lester et al., 2005; Solberg et al., 1995). Learning within a humanistic environment seeks to encourage and promote integrative

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judgments, where learners bring together information from a range of sources and consider their value to underpin and support their decision making. Bringing a humanistic lens into decision making in the classroom or learning environment helps to bring morals and values into decisions and integrative judgements, rather than relying only on analytical specialisation.

It has been suggested that entrepreneurship is both an economic and social process, where both social interaction and networking play a prominent role (Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011). This is reinforced by scholars who have opined that effective entrepreneurship education should focus on learning from social processes and experiences (Rae, 2005). Humanism presents learning as being a relational activity, where the learner needs to engage with others to develop their knowledge and skills. Such a perspective is a shift away from learning which can be a socially isolated activity where the learner is focused on their own self-interest, to a more community-oriented view of learning (Dierksmeier, 2020). Learning in a humanistic environment can support students in developing their social skills and developing their networks, both of which can support effective entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship education literature stresses the importance of supporting learners' emotional well-being as entrepreneurial experiences frequently present stressful situations and potentially failure (Shepherd, 2004; Testa and Frascheri, 2015). Therefore, there is a need to develop resilient learners who can manage, learn, and bounce back from entrepreneurial failure (Kauppinen et al., 2019). However, well-being and failure are rarely addressed and discussed in the entrepreneurship classroom, giving an unrealistic picture of entrepreneurship to students (Alvarado Valenzuela et al., 2020). Humanistic learning encourages educators to consider students current and future well-being, and the knowledge and skills they will need to ensure this. This could be effectively translated into the entrepreneurship education classroom by discussing and preparing students for potential stressful entrepreneurial situations and failure by engaging with emotion. Negative entrepreneurial experiences can be discussed in a humanistic learning environment, which creates a warm, accepting and non-threatening atmosphere, where positive and respectful interactions between peers can occur (Allender, 2001). It has been suggested that failure to

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prepare and support students for entrepreneurial failure adequately is a potential unspoken shortcoming of entrepreneurship education (Bandera et al., 2020).

Having discussed and explored how a humanistic entrepreneurship education classroom can offer a learning environment suitable for developing entrepreneurs, this chapter will now conclude by discussing how a humanistic approach can be used effectively in entrepreneurship education.

Applying Humanism in the Entrepreneurship Classroom

Entrepreneurship education requires a range of approaches based on a variety of philosophies and theories to support the successful delivery of entrepreneurship education (Bell and Bell, 2020; Ramsgaard, 2018; Robinson et al., 2016). Different philosophies support different types of learning which are required within entrepreneurship education. Traditional didactic teaching approaches can provide the basic factual knowledge, structural frameworks and instruction to undertake more progressive forms of active learning, which are particularly efficacious in entrepreneurship education.

Humanism, like constructivism, supports the development of subjective knowledge through active experience. This involves the educator moving away from a rigid curriculum, encouraging choice, allowing students to follow and engage in activities of interest, and learn through inquiry and challenge, to achieve the entrepreneurial skills they require within a humanistic learning environment. The role of the educator is to facilitate the wider development of the whole person within a liberating environment (Merriam et al., 2007) which requires them to facilitate the process in an empathetic, positive and supportive manner, in a safe and constructive environment.

Whilst the influence of humanism can, perhaps, be visualised most clearly in a heutagogical approach to teaching and learning, in a setting in which learners are largely autonomous and self-directed, it can also be introduced into androgogic/pedagogic approaches, alongside other philosophies to achieve different types of learning. Even within the more directed approaches to entrepreneurship education, students are commonly given space to generate their own ideas and business plans that can be directed towards solving social problems. Such approaches can reinforce students' creativity, empowerment and concern for others.

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Humanism espouses the acquisition of value-orientated skills and the integrative judgements within learners. It incorporates personal acts of fulfilment that include engaging and working with the community. Humanistic approaches to education can incorporate these values. For example, value creation pedagogy is an approach that has been gaining traction in recent years and can be considered in terms of entrepreneurship as it is based on acting upon opportunities and ideas and transforming them into value for others (Lackéus, 2020). It focuses on value for others rather than neoliberal values and venture creation, which may make it more widely acceptable across disciplines (Lackéus et al., 2016). Importantly, it has the potential to encourage humanistic learning and behaviours including rationality, autonomy, empowerment, creativity and a concern for others. It can also provide an opportunity to work with a community to develop empathy and compassion skills to understand and solve a problem which, in the long term, may play a part in encouraging the development of social entrepreneurship. Such approaches have the potential to integrate more practical and active learning in more traditional educational contexts and where institutions and educators might be less focused on commercialism and profit (Bell, 2020). However, challenges have been identified around ensuring students can see the links between the development of value and entrepreneurship and innovation (Bell, 2020) and there is a need to ensure that the value created in the classroom is driven by purpose, agency and capability and supported by cultured reflection (Jones et al., 2021).

In conclusion, Humanism seeks to move learning from a socially isolated activity to a more relational activity and from a perspective of individual self-interest to a more community orientated perspective (Dierksmeier, 2020). Whilst the integration of a humanistic approach to entrepreneurship education can be seen to be more complex, lacking structure and routine, and potentially more time consuming, the addition of humanistic values to entrepreneurship education can offer genuine benefits to both the individual learners and society alike and can support HEI's in meeting their organisational missions.

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