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ENTERPRISE EDUCATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

A Comparative Study
Between Italy and Australia



Enterprise Education in Vocational Education

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Enterprise Education in Vocational Education

A Comparative Study Between Italy and
Australia

Daniele Morselli

University of Helsinki, Finland

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2015 978-1-137-55259-4

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First published 2015 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-55970-1 ISBN 978-1-137-55261-7 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137552617

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

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Foreword

Umberto Margiotta

Over the last 20 years there have been a great number of studies about the ways in which traditional learning is considered, both in formative and school contexts. Three types of issues have emerged from considering the formative success of the individual:

- a) *Cognitive problems*: the competencies acquired in the school context are rarely utilized to deal with experiences and problems in life contexts;
- b) *Social problems*: the individuals generally privilege the models of social success rather than the models acquired in situations of formal learning; and
- c) *Diffusive innovation deficit*: both companies and educational institutions are enterprises dealing with “the distribution of knowledge and rules”, where competencies that cannot be learned elsewhere are acquired.

As a consequence, our society appears segmented. The continuity between formative contexts and work and life environments does not proceed in an orderly fashion. On the contrary, a deep division is produced between formal intelligence and practical intelligence.

I followed Daniele Morselli’s project with growing interest, since it is related to the issues above. I observed the way he was nurturing a meaningful research programme, and the work he presents on his workshop on entrepreneurship education in this book illustrates the elements of such a programme. The programme starts from the observation that the relationship between training and agentivity is rapidly changing; every person has the frequent need to reorganize and reinvent his or her knowledge, competences and work. This is the reason that the goal of education cannot be to pursue the development of techniques and skills, but rather to accompany one’s personal learning, so that it can evolve into a system of boundary crossing actions to allow each individual to deal with and master the uncertain and mutable trajectories of change within specific situations.

How can we understand the modalities and shapes of such learning? The originality of Morselli's proposal stems from this point: starting from the third generation of activity theory, Morselli shows how Engestrom's theory of expansive learning differs significantly from the other contemporary theories of adult learning such as Mezirov's theory, the theoretical framework of the community of practice by Wenger and, especially, Kolb's theory of experiential learning. From these differences Morselli designs, experiments and generalizes his workshops for entrepreneurship education.

The most important difference from the expansive learning theory and the other learning theories is that every human activity is characterized by the participation of the individuals in complex contexts of collective action that comprehend diverse entities in relation to one another, such as subjects, mediational artefacts, community, rules and procedures, division of labour, results and object. In so doing, the paradigm of distributed cognition analyses cognition and learning by representing them as collective activities mediated by not only cultural artefacts (tools and signs), but also rules, community and division of labour. Learning is therefore much more than Kolb's paradigm of experience, and much more than the phenomenology of individual transformation as described by Mezirov. The perspective of expansive learning frees the analysis and the evaluation of meaningful learning from Rousseauist naturalistic revisionism. Learning is characterized as a process of transfer gained through the interaction of systems made of collective entities.

The perspective inspected by Morselli considers the transactional perspective (besides the dialogical perspective) between activity systems, and allows the freeing of the concept of entrepreneurship from its neoliberal and voluntarist drifts which are unfortunately still prominent today. I have always reminded Morselli that the conceptual focus of his research was on enterprise education as a pedagogy, rather than on entrepreneurship, a term reckoned to be more "fashionable". The concept of boundary crossing results not only in the way two activity systems meet and 'contaminate' each other, as stated by Wenger. Boundary crossing also depends by the generativity of learning for both individuals and for collective entities. By generative I mean that learning generates new horizons, new possibilities and new trajectories of life and cognition.

Most importantly, it is not possible to confuse Engestrom's expansive learning with Wenger's community of practice. The latter studies the processes of acquisition of knowledge in adult groups basing on the

conception of learning as participation in situated and contextualized practices. In so doing, learning dynamically interacts with the processes of construction of the individual identity. It is a social theory of learning inspired by Vygotskian reflections, whereby social participation is characterized by learning and knowing. However, Wenger's theory does not explain in a transactive and generative way the learning transformations.

Yet by following Engestrom, Morselli illustrates how it is possible, within formative workshop contexts, to overcome the dichotomy between organizational learning and organizational transformation. In order to trigger expansive learning cycles in an environment, the individuals have to deal with the internal contradictions characterizing the organization and confront them. The learning actions related to expansive learning are realized through collective and recursive processes of negotiation of meanings.

We cannot but wish that the author continues his research programme, since it certainly brings advancement to pedagogy and educational research.

Umberto Margiotta
Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Foreword

Massimiliano Costa

In this day and age the job market calls not only for the development of new and complex professional skills and abilities, but also for a professional competency needed to master ever-changing problems in the best way.

It is the role of education to provide young people with the competencies needed in society, education that could and should be delivered according to a capability approach as developed by Sen. The main focus of the capability approach is on what people are able to do – that is, are capable of. *Agency* freedom is a core ingredient of positive social change: individuals can act to bring about changes valued as important for them and their communities. The collective spaces where individuals can discuss and make decisions about things they value as important are vital to improving their capabilities.

Nurturing the students' *agency* does not only mean giving them the necessary practical knowledge through which to master different situations. More importantly, agency entails an openness to change, the readiness to reflect upon experience, an intellectual activity beyond action, the willingness to learn and work with others in the workplace, and being able to conjugate thinking and action. This vision of agency goes well beyond a neoliberal perspective based on the functional needs of a school oriented to the job market, and promotes the student's creative freedom when confronted with problems in the work or school contests. Agency becomes the ability to make use of resources, preferences, attitudes and values towards the student's future projects: professional choices in employed or self-employed jobs that are important to them.

The role of education in promoting an entrepreneurial mindset has recently gained importance within the European strategies for employment: the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship is defined by the European Union as a set of knowledge, skills and habits needed to turn ideas into action. As Morselli observes, the entrepreneurial competence represents "a mindset that can help the students and future citizens to be entrepreneurial throughout their life in the different activities they will undertake: in the family, in the workplace, or in their

social life". The spirit of initiative, a proactive attitude, creative thinking, entrepreneurial capability and the ability to manage risks constitute the kernel of these strategic intangible competences activating the agency needed to master problems beyond the technical competencies from a lifelong learning perspective. As Morselli writes: "The competence of the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship is primarily about agency. [...] [E]specially at an employability level, [it] was reported as related to being autonomous, as well as cooperating with others. There is no doubt that this competence is mostly mobilized in the workplace; however the participants said that it can also be put into practice in every context of daily life and hence in a lifelong learning perspective."

In the interesting research carried out by Morselli between Italy and Australia, it seems that, although the two contexts differ significantly, the Change Laboratory, a promising type of workshop bringing about social change and innovation, enabled the students the chance to learn from work experience. The Change Laboratory helped the students enhance their ability to interpret information, starting from discussion with the stakeholders, when confronted with relevant problems. Morselli highlights this by stating that "Students also need to be provided with participatory spaces where they can discuss and reflect on the issues important for them, so that they can make informed decisions. In addition to creating new opportunities, this process also expands the students' positive freedom, autonomy and personal initiative."

The model put forward by Morselli in this book displays how the enhancement of the *learning curriculum* arrived at through *workbased learning* is related to the capacity to involve students to discuss and reflect on the learning relationships between being actively involved in the workplace and studying in class. This model encourages students to become "critical anthropologists" of the practice they take part in, both in the workplace as apprentices and in school as students.

The experimental evidence of Morselli's research shows that an experience in the work environment is formative if, together with the acquisition of technical competencies, the student is given responsibility and realizes him- or herself according to a capability approach: this requires a new modality to design work-based learning models, which should be centred on participative dialectics with work tutors and school teachers. As highlighted by Morselli, the value of experience comes from the creation of "collective spaces where students, their teachers and mentors can work together at the boundary and reflect on how to bridge school and work, and improve the quality of the training delivered". The Change Laboratory workshops in Australia and Italy

were felt by the students and all the participants involved to be places of active participation instead of – as often happens – being worthless and unconnected with the students' objectives. It is thus important to value the relationship between the teaching staff and the work tutors, ensuring not only adequate training, but also their generative interaction with the students – that is, an interaction generating new ideas, concepts and courses of action.

Overall, Morselli's contribution indicates a new path for educational policies according to a capability approach centred on the role of the student and his or her participative, critical and reflective abilities. From this point of view, training for the entrepreneurial competence enhances one's levels of social awareness, participation and responsibility, thus enhancing one's personal and professional life projects.

Massimiliano Costa
Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Introduction

Homo faber fortunae suae.

Appius Claudius Caecus

The words attributed to Appius Claudius Caecus enjoy a widespread and unique popularity, and are often used to express the idea that humankind is the manufacturer of its own destiny. Nowadays, modern education systems are confronting the issue of how to teach students to turn ideas into actions. This requires autonomy, creativity, initiative and the capacity to seize opportunities. This is called entrepreneurship education, and it is the type of education necessary for a citizen living in the era of globalization to be the manufacturer of his or her own destiny. *Homo faber* is also useful as it evokes the image of the craftspeople (*faber* literally means blacksmith). In this regard, the modern institution preparing craftspeople for working life is vocational education and training (VET). Hence, *homo faber* characterizes the very subject of this research: enterprise education in vocational education.

This comparative project has been written for the international reader interested in modern vocational systems, such as the Australian and the Italian systems. Entrepreneurship education and vocational education are considered key elements in combating youth unemployment and helping students face and thrive on the challenges of globalization. Other challenges they will be faced with include climate change and the consequent need for green technologies and economies. At the same time, when turning these challenges into opportunities, young people will have to create value and empower their communities. It is for this reason that improving vocational students' capabilities was another aim of this research.

Here it is argued that the 7th European key competence of the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship can be examined through a

sociocultural laboratory of social change called the Change Laboratory. Vocational students are seen as boundary crossers, as in their vocational courses they often cross the boundaries between school and work. The boundary is characterized by tensions (and thus problems) due to different sociocultural environments encountering diverse objectives, rules, divisions of labour, communities, tools and outcomes. These tensions can also be considered a resource, and thus a learning opportunity for students to show a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. In this study, the challenges students are facing are discussed within the Change Laboratory workshops, together with teachers and work tutors (representatives of the two interacting activity systems), in a joint effort to redesign the activity systems of school and work and the relationship between them.

Results from the two very different vocational contexts in Australia and Italy permitted a comparison to better understand the elements that encourage a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship in vocational education.

This study is divided into six chapters.

Chapter 1 presents the problem. According to many scholars, since the 1970s the prominent role of knowledge as the driver of innovation and change has determined a dramatic switch from a managed society to an entrepreneurial society, characterized by extremely dynamic small and medium enterprises. In this context, citizens must be equipped with a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship (which is essentially about “turning ideas into action”) in order to master globalization and change from a lifelong learning perspective. Entrepreneurship teaching is essential to improving the quality of vocational education and thus combat youth unemployment, a phenomenon widespread in Europe and elsewhere.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature to frame the research project. The main research streams are: the concept of competence and its developments; sociocultural studies on expertise seen as boundary crossing; a critical analysis of the introduction of the competence concept in education; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship as a European key competence for lifelong learning; entrepreneurship teaching in vocational education; and the Change Laboratory within Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to bring about expansive learning and social change.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework, and considers the practical details of the research. It is concerned with the timeline for the research in Italy and Australia, including the request for authorizations;

the observant participation; the Change Laboratory workshops; and the follow up. Concerning the follow up, the same chapter will present the questionnaire used to gather data on the educational and socio-economic outcomes of the research. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. The first part is made up of multiple-choice questions on the 7th European key competence on the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. Following this, to better investigate the meaning attributed by the participants to the experience, the second part of the questionnaire comprises open questions on the 7th European key competence and the Change Laboratory.

Chapter 4 describes the outcomes of each of the Change Laboratory workshops in Italy and Australia. This is preceded by a historical analysis of the context as well as the way in which entrepreneurship education was delivered in the two settings. Consistent with the principles of CHAT, a historical analysis is necessary to better understand the meaning given by the participants to the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship as well as the Change Laboratory workshops.

The following chapters focus on the results and deal with the comparative study and the conclusions. Chapter 5 starts by comparing the quantitative and qualitative answers in the two contexts and then comments on the results. This entails: a comparison and synthesis of the banners made by the students in the light of the Engestrom triangle; considerations on the role of triggering events in entrepreneurship education and learning processes at the boundary; and the answers to the multiple-choice and open questions.

Chapter 6 summarizes the entire study, starting with the issue confronted, youth unemployment and the role of entrepreneurship education and vocational education in a globalized society. It also describes the comparative study and presents the main findings. The chapter then identifies connections between the cultural approaches to entrepreneurship, the Change Laboratory and the capabilities approach. Next the chapter identifies the common Zone of Proximal Development of vocational education and the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship. Two proposals for future research are put forward. Suggestions are given on how to improve the Australian and Italian VET systems.

This work has been supervised by two people: Massimiliano Costa, research fellow at the Ca' Foscari University, and John Polesel, Professor at the Melbourne Graduate School for Education. Massimiliano and John's suggestions have been complementary. Massimiliano assisted this project and contributed very much to improving its content with his

useful advice. His knowledge of educational processes within the industry and of competence has been extraordinarily important to grounding this work on a solid basis. John's suggestions have been essential as well. John has helped in planning the research and establishing the structure of the work. His knowledge of vocational education and comparative educational policies has been invaluable. Special thanks goes to the two reviewers: Yrjo Engestrom of the University of Helsinki and Giuditta Alessandrini of the University Roma Tre.

1

Why Entrepreneurship?

The impact of globalization on our lives

The world is currently living through one of the most extraordinary moments in human history. According to Volkmann et al. (2009, p. 6), “the power equation continues shifting across countries and regions, while rapid changes unfold in the marketplace reshaping both the political landscape and the interactions between governments and businesses”. It has been argued that our societies are becoming more and more open and plural (Cárdenas Gutiérrez & Bernal Guerrero, 2011): within societies, individuals have more opportunities to realize their dreams and their space for action and initiative is improving.

A new definition of human development has come to the fore: “[A]gainst the dominant emphasis on economic growth as an indicator of a nation’s quality of life, Sen [an Indian philosopher and economist who wrote about social justice] has insisted on the importance of the capabilities, what people are actually able to do and to be” (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 33). Human development is seen as a match between the ideas of development and substantial freedom: a “process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (Sen, 1999, p. 9). In addition to economic assets, human development depends on social assets, such as welfare and education systems, and political ones, such as civil rights and political participation. The freedom to act is represented by the possibilities and opportunities to access diverse courses of action due to individual resources and values. The centrality of the subject with their freedom to act is thus emphasized: thanks to their agency based on their capacities, the individual becomes the trigger for social and economic development, this time inclusive, sustainable and smart (Costa, 2012).

In this context of the expansion of individual freedom, the paradigm of the “entrepreneurial society” is emerging: “[T]he old paradigm of the twentieth century is being replaced with the new paradigm of the entrepreneurial society – a society which rewards creative adaptation, opportunity seeking and the drive to make innovative ideas happen” (Bahri & Haftendorn, 2006, p. IX). The “knowledge era” in which we are living is characterized by the knowledge society and the knowledge economy, and the “knowledge mindset” (Badawi, 2013) becomes important to help the individual “navigate today’s uncertainties and tomorrow’s unknown developments, not only in labour markets but in all aspects of life” (p. 277).

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), one of the most important changes across societies has been the shift from a “managed” economy to an “entrepreneurial” one (OECD, 2010c). The former was found in mass production societies characterized by “stable employment in large firms and a central role of unions and employers in regulating the economy and society in partnership with government. The social contract included regulation of labour markets and a strong welfare state” (p. 31). This type of society was predominant in the post-Second World War era thanks to the advantages of large companies and large scale production (Audretsch, 2003). However, the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has been growing since the 1970s in North America and in Europe. The emergence of small niches in the markets, the rapid obsolescence of goods and computer-driven production have made it possible for small companies to compete with the larger ones, taking away most of the competitive advantages big firms used to have. Together with this shift, other changes have occurred: “[T]he growth of the knowledge economy, open innovation, increased global connections, non-technological innovation, the Silicon Valley business model, and social innovation and entrepreneurship – represent an important change in the environment in which innovation takes place” (OECD, 2010c, p. 31). In both advanced and developing economies, the shift to a knowledge society has made knowledge the most important factor of production. In this shift, SMEs have become more competitive due to their ability to be flexible. All these changes have contributed to the emergence of a new economy in which SMEs and entrepreneurship play a crucial role as drivers of innovation growth and creators of jobs (OECD, 2010c).

At the same time, societies are facing global changes extending well beyond the economy, and global competitiveness is making demands on governance, organization and lifestyle structures.

In recent years, the economic fortunes of different countries around the world have become less predictable as national economies become more closely woven together. Companies look for locations with the cheapest operating costs, while capital moves quickly across national borders seeking the highest return. Many population groups find themselves moving to follow employment opportunities or to secure a better quality of life.

(Bahri & Haftendorn, 2006, p. IX)

There is a need to prepare young people for a life of greater uncertainty and complexity, including elements such as frequent occupational changes in job and type of contract; improved mobility; the need to cope with different cultures; the increased probability of self-employment; and more responsibilities, both in family and in social life (Gibb, 2002). Moreover, in the Western economies, phenomena like delocalization have reduced the number of jobs available in manufacturing. At the same time, the level of skills necessary to work in industry is getting wider and deeper:

The world's population is growing at a time when traditional, stable labour markets are shrinking. In developed and developing countries alike, rapid globalization and technological change have altered both how national economies are organized and what is produced. Countries differ widely in their restructuring practices, but redundancies, unemployment and lack of gainful employment opportunities have been some of the main social costs of recent economic changes around the world.

(Bahri & Haftendorn, 2006, p. 1)

In this scenario, in many countries young people are often left behind.

The issue of youth unemployment

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), five years after the beginning of the global financial crisis, global growth has started decelerating again and unemployment has risen, leaving 202 million jobless people in 2013 (ILO, 2014). The current trend is expected to continue, and by 2018 there will be 215 million jobseekers. Young people have particularly suffered the consequences of the crisis with 6.4 million dropping out from the job market in 2012 alone (ILO, 2012a). It has been calculated that 74.5 million young people were