

## **Influences of a participatory strategy process on entrepreneurship education practices**

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**Abstract:** The European Commission's Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan mentions school-based entrepreneurship education as a key issue in ensuring the development of the European welfare. Already in 2009, the Ministry of Education and Culture in Finland announced national guidelines for reaching the objectives for entrepreneurship education by 2015. Therefore, regions started targeted development actions towards improved entrepreneurship education. In Northern Ostrobothnia, both a strategy and an operating model for entrepreneurship education were created as a participatory strategy process during 2015. A total of 200 individuals from education, private enterprises and the public sector were involved in the strategy process.

Practitioners and researchers share a common understanding of the central elements to be included in entrepreneurship education. Presence of these central elements in different levels of education in northern Finland was investigated in 2013. The investigation showed that some central elements of the coherent pathway of entrepreneurship education were not being realized at the target region, and the resources were not optimally allocated between the central elements. Some of the central elements were repeated at almost all levels of education while others were nearly absent. The study pointed out there was need for a joint entrepreneurship education strategic action.

This paper presents a cross-sectional multiple-case study seeking to form a whole picture of an entrepreneurship education pathway in Northern Finland in spring 2017, and to compare it with the earlier investigation from 2013. The aim of this study is to recognize and analyze potential changes in entrepreneurship education practices one year after the participatory strategy process and publication of the strategy. The data is based on a web-based semi-structured questionnaire, which was sent to headmasters and other management of basic and secondary level education, education planners, and study advisors. The units of analysis are different levels of education (comprehensive school, secondary school, polytechnics and universities).

The findings will show whether entrepreneurship education strategy guides education practices in schools. The result will be useful in implementation of and informing on entrepreneurship education strategy.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship education, strategy, education, case study, Finland

## 1. Introduction

The European Commission's Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan names school-based entrepreneurship education as a key issue for ensuring the development of the European welfare. There is a clear need to advance an entrepreneurial culture by encouraging students to adopt the right mindset, learn certain entrepreneurial skills and maintain awareness of career opportunities, and teaching entrepreneurship at every level of education is important in this context (Commission of the European Communities 2006, Seikkula-Leino et al. 2010). Accordingly, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture announced national guidelines to ensure it reaches its entrepreneurship education objectives by 2015 (Ministry of Education 2009a). Therefore, the various Finnish regions have initiated targeted development actions for improving entrepreneurship education.

In Finland, entrepreneurship education refers to both entrepreneurship in business and enterprising behaviour (Ministry of Education 2009a). Finland has extensively promoted entrepreneurship education through curricula reforms undertaken at all educational levels. In its Guidelines for Entrepreneurship Education (Ministry of Education 2009b), defined entrepreneurship education as a broad concept that extends beyond a practice of trade to encompass training for entrepreneurship. The goal of entrepreneurship education is to develop active individuals with initiative by providing an entrepreneurial learning environment, education and training, and active and enterprise-promoting policies in society. Therefore, many regions started targeted development actions towards improved entrepreneurship education. In Northern Ostrobothnia, both a strategy and an operating model for entrepreneurship education were created as a participatory strategy process during 2015. A total of 200 individuals from education, private enterprises and the public sector were involved in the strategy process.

This paper presents a cross-sectional multiple-case study seeking to form a whole picture of an entrepreneurship education pathway in Northern Finland in spring 2017, and to compare it with the earlier investigation from 2013. The aim of this study is to recognize and analyze potential changes in entrepreneurship education practices one year after the participatory strategy process and publication of the strategy. The data is based on a web-based semi-structured questionnaire, which was sent to headmasters and other management of basic and secondary level education, education planners, and study advisors. The units of analysis are different levels of education (comprehensive school, secondary school, polytechnics and universities).

## 2. Theoretical Background

Strategy is planned compliance of action (Mintzberg 1987), where it is essential to act otherwise than one's competitors (Porter 1996). Strategy focuses on action and introduces the phenomenon of consistency in behavior (Mintzberg 1987). Also public sector actors need to renew although they do not compete on the market like private enterprises do (Llewellyn, Tappin 2003). Also regional vigour can be renewed using joint strategies. In Northern Ostrobothnia a joint strategy work was conducted to promote the aims of the whole county.

Management has traditionally planned the strategy that should be deployed through participation (Pietilä 2015). It is important for the prevention of problems and making implementation easier to involve the implementers in the strategy planning work (Mantere, Vaara 2008). Strategy-as-practices studies by Jarzabkowski et al. (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007) indicate that middle managers and lower-level employees are also important strategic actors.

Binding strategy with the subject matter and expertise opens new perspectives for participation in the strategy work. Ideally the participation in strategy work is connected to the subject matter and contextual expertise which helps to solve work-related problems and expertise can be directed optimally. However, this does not mean that the top management should not remain active in strategy work. Top management should focus on its own operational level and avoid involvement with subject matters for which expertise is found in other parts of the organization. Subject matters related to strategy work are most appropriately dealt by those who have best expertise in them (Pietilä 2015).

In Finland entrepreneurship education is the concept used to refer to the aspects of both entrepreneurship and enterprising behaviour (Ministry of Education 2009a). Finland has extensively promoted entrepreneurship education in curricula reforms undertaken at all educational levels. In the publication "Guidelines of entrepreneurship education" (Ministry of Education 2009a) entrepreneurship education is defined as a much

broader concept than entrepreneurship as a practice of trade. As a concept, it also encompasses training for entrepreneurship. Its components are an active individual with initiative, an entrepreneurial learning environment, education and training, and active and enterprise-promoting policy in society.

Teaching entrepreneurship allows individuals to develop their talents and creativity. In entrepreneurial education learners develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes and mode of operation, enabling them to act in an entrepreneurial manner in their own lives together with others. (Wang, Ellinger 2011). Entrepreneurship is basically more than business. Business is a way of putting entrepreneurship into practice. Learning entrepreneurship means learning about, learning for, learning through and learning within entrepreneurship.

Characteristics of an entrepreneurial educational organization can be seen in leadership and governance (commitment to development), organizational capacity, people and incentives, entrepreneurship development in teaching and learning, pathways for entrepreneurs, school – business/external relationships for knowledge exchange, the entrepreneurial university as an internationalized institution and measuring the impact of the entrepreneurial university (Arene 2015).

Entrepreneurial pedagogy requires learning arrangements that enable holistic, active, dynamic, creative, free and responsible learning in all dimensions of entrepreneurship. Learning can be seen as an action-based process using diversified learning environments (Pfeffer & Fong 2002, Gibb 2009). The teacher's role is coaching and enabling the students' learning. As a pedagogical method close co-operation with local companies in vocational and higher education is one mode of learning by doing. Practical and activating teaching and learning motivates the students and helps them to acquire significant entrepreneurial talents (entrepreneurial capabilities).

The goals of entrepreneurship education focus more on operational actions than on entrepreneurship-related information and procedures. Entrepreneurship is also connected with innovation (Alvarez, Barney 2007); Sarasvathy 2001, Shane 2000). In this sense, the subject of entrepreneurship education should be a functional entity, the output being new activity (Isokangas 2009). Searching business opportunities can be seen as one starting point in entrepreneurship education (DeTienne & Chandler 2004, Hills, Shrader & Lumpkin 1999). Active searching of business opportunity is both a creative process (Hills, Shrader & Lumpkin 1999) and a process of utilizing the opportunity (Rae 2004, Honig 2004). Business opportunity recognition is an orientation process towards new business, utilizing one's own experience and expertise. In this entrepreneurial learning process students have active roles and they benefit from the social dimension of the networks (Rae, Carswell 2000).

Practitioners and researchers share a common understanding of the central elements that entrepreneurship education should include. Kyrö's (1997) model, which has gained widespread acceptance in Finland, has three main aspects: (1) internal entrepreneurship, which refers to individual attitudes within a group or work community; (2) external entrepreneurship, or doing business; and (3) self-oriented entrepreneurship, which refers to individual actions, behaviours and attitudes (Kyrö et al, 1995, Kyrö 1997). Various entrepreneurship education strategies have referenced this model in describing what elements should be taught to students at different ages. Seikkula-Leino (2007) also developed entrepreneurship education strategies by providing additional practices that entrepreneurship education should address, including community, problem-solving, learning from mistakes, creativity and reflection.

Strategy success can only be evaluated after reaching the results (Pfeffer 1993). This study is the first analysis on the realization of the content. One pre-requisition for success in strategy implementations is that the content is understood in the similar way (Pfeffer 1993). Like in the evaluation from 2013 (Eskola et al. 2017'n.d., forthcoming), this study focuses on the coherent entrepreneurship education pathway developed by the Southwest Finland region as part of its entrepreneurship strategy, which goal is to support and improve learners working lives and entrepreneurial skills throughout the learning pathway (Table 1) (Nieminen, Vainio 2013). The present study aims to analyse how the central elements of this entrepreneurship education pathway are incorporated at different education levels in Northern Finland.

**Table 1.** Coherent entrepreneurship education pathway (adapted from the Entrepreneurship Strategy in Southwest Finland, 2020, 2013).

Elements of entrepreneurial education	Age groups					
	Element 1 Target age: 0–6 years old	Element 2 Target age: 7–8 years old	Element 3 Target age: 9–12 years old	Element 4 Target age: 13–15 years old	Element 5 Target age: 16–19 years old	Element 6 Target age: 20+ years old
Self-oriented entrepreneurship	A positive and curious attitude towards life	An entrepreneurial attitude towards learning	Personal responsibility and personal expertise	The desire and ability to improve	The ability to persevere and achieve future goals	A passion for lifelong learning
Intrapreneurship	The ability to enjoy playing and working with others	Skills of taking regard to other team and be able to work fairly	Development of teamwork and collaborative skills	The ability to work as a responsible team member	The ability to contribute to personal and team development	The ability to assemble and lead teams
Entrepreneurship	Goal-oriented playing	Teamwork	Collaboration on projects	Projects that are from the learner aspect	Entrepreneurial business activity	Company management and business development

### 3. Aims

The present study aims to analyse how the central elements of Southwest Finland’s entrepreneurship education pathway are incorporated at different education levels in Northern Finland, and specifically, in the Northern Ostrobothnia region. To this end, we have developed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the central elements of entrepreneurship education at different education levels in Northern Ostrobothnia?

RQ2: Are there changes in implementation of entrepreneurship education compared to year 2013?

### 4. Methodology: Data Collection & Analysis

The North Ostrobothnia province in Northern Finland includes seven sub-regions and 30 municipalities. The province has approximately 410.000 inhabitants, and the population is relatively young: 33% of inhabitants are younger than age 25, compared to 28% of inhabitants in Finland overall (Official Statistics of Finland, (OSF) 2017). Of the 27.029 operating enterprises in the area, 95% are microenterprises, or enterprises with fewer than 10 employees. Of these microenterprises, 95% employ fewer than five persons (Jokela et al. 2016). The region includes 308 individual schools with more than 7100 staff members in education, in addition to that several education programmes provided by external education institutions (Official Statistics of Finland, (OSF) 2015).

The present strategy work in Northern Ostrobothnia was launched by contacting municipalities and education organizations in the region. The managers of education organizations were requested to name their employees into the process. Participants were also recruited through a newsletter sent to all organizations. A total of 200 individuals from education, private enterprises and the public sector were involved in the strategy process.

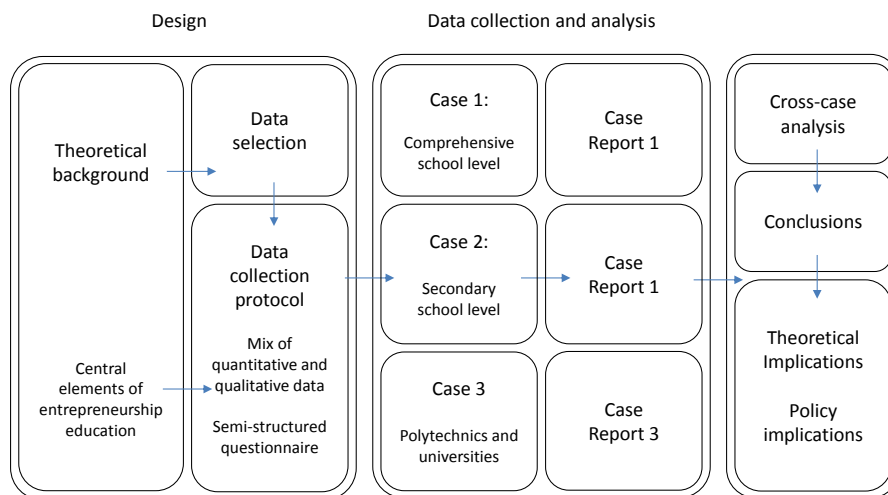
Strategy work was conducted on four levels. Management level coordinated the work in the whole region. Education personnel had regional network meetings and they also worked in their home organizations between the network meetings. Data collection and writing was conducted in a small group including a representant from each education level. The work was finished in February 2016. The publication of the strategy was announced in newspapers and digital platforms.

The data collected in this study is based on a web-based semi-structured questionnaire including both quantitative and qualitative elements. The online survey was e-mailed to a total of 526 managers and education

planners of education organizations, of which 61 (12 %) participated in the study. The level of education represented by the informant and the municipality were used as background information, because the study aims to receive a representative sample of responses from all education levels and different geographical parts of the region. The survey was not sent out to representatives of pre-primary education (age 0-6y), and the respective parts of the entrepreneurial pathway were excluded in the data analysis.

The informants were asked to choose two most important elements of entrepreneurial education that are emphasized most at their organization. The informants could choose between the central elements included in the entrepreneurial pathway. To gain a realistic understanding, the target ages presented in Table 1 were not shown to informants in order to avoid giving leading cues. Intrapreneurship, entrepreneurship and self-oriented entrepreneurship were included as separate items.

This cross-sectional multiple-case study (Yin 1989, Saunders et al. 2012) aims to analyse how the central elements of entrepreneurship education are incorporated at different education levels in Northern Finland. According to Yin (1989), 'A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used'. Figure 2 describes the research process we followed:



**Figure 1.** Research process (modified from Yin, 1989)

This study examines entrepreneurial education at three different levels – (1) comprehensive schools, (2) secondary schools, and (3) polytechnic schools and universities – to develop a comprehensive picture of the entrepreneurship education pathway in Northern Finland. By doing so, this study seeks to evaluate entrepreneurship education and highlight any gaps.

## 5. Findings

We present the findings for our research questions in Tables 2–4. There are darkened areas in each table representing the recommended elements in each school level. The marked areas represent the ideal emphasis of the central elements at different education levels (see Table 2 for element descriptions). Comprehensive schools should focus on elements 2–4 from bottom, while secondary schools should focus on Elements 4 and 5, and polytechnic schools and universities should focus on the most advanced elements, Elements 5 and 6.

Table 2 summarises how self-oriented entrepreneurship is taught at different education levels based on the entrepreneurship education pathway. One central element was notably emphasised at all education levels: Responsibility for oneself and personal expertise. However, the overemphasis of this element as well as An entrepreneurial attitude towards learning has diminished at all education levels since 2013. In the previous measurement, two elements ideally targeted at polytechnics and universities, namely The ability to construct own dream future and A passion for lifelong learning, were paid very little attention at all education levels (Eskola et al. 2017'n.d., forthcoming). In the present survey, their emphasis had increased remarkably.

**Table 2.** The central self-oriented entrepreneurship elements taught at different education levels. Comparison for the years 2013 (Eskola et al. 2017'n.d., forthcoming) and 2017.

	Case 1: Comprehensive school		Case 2: Secondary school		Case 3: Polytechnics and universities	
	2013 n=20	2017 n=39	2013 n=23	2017 n=29	2013 n=18	2017 n=12
Self-oriented entrepreneurship <i>number of choices</i>	39	72	45	52	39	25
A passion for lifelong learning	0 %	4 %	0 %	2 %	3 %	16 %
The ability to construct own dream future	8 %	5 %	7 %	6 %	10 %	12 %
The desire and ability to improve	13 %	12 %	16 %	16 %	28 %	20 %
Responsibility of oneself and personal expertise	36 %	32 %	42 %	34 %	33 %	24 %
An entrepreneurial attitude towards learning	26 %	25 %	24 %	21 %	18 %	16 %
A positive and curious attitude towards life	18 %	22 %	11 %	22 %	8 %	12 %
* Marked areas: Recommended elements in each school level						

In intrapreneurship, The ability to work as a responsible team member was emphasised at all education levels in 2013. Now its proportionally emphasis had decreased in polytechnics and universities closer to the ideal level. Also the emphasis of The ability to contribute to personal and team development share is closer to ideal now. Table 3 shows also a slight improvement for The ability to assemble and lead teams gains, that gained very little attention in the previous survey.

The elements in secondary school as well as polytechnics and universities should still be increased towards the ideal. The elements in polytechnics and universities show some improvements but still more than a half of the elements taught are ideally planned for lower education levels.

**Table 3.** The central intrapreneurship elements taught at different education levels. Comparison for the years 2013 (Eskola et al. 2017'n.d., forthcoming) and 2017.

	Case 1: Comprehensive school		Case 2: Secondary school		Case 3: Polytechnics and universities	
	2013 n=20	2017 n=39	2013 n=23	2017 n=29	2013 n=18	2017 n=12
Intrapreneurship (percentage of choices) <i>number of choices</i>	39	74	45	50	37	24
The ability to assemble and lead teams	0 %	1 %	2 %	4 %	11 %	13 %
The ability to contribute to personal and team development	8 %	6 %	29 %	18 %	32 %	33 %
The ability to work as a responsible team member	33 %	34 %	36 %	47 %	35 %	29 %
Understanding of teamwork and collaborative skills	5 %	9 %	18 %	14 %	19 %	21 %
Skills of taking regard to other team and be able to work fairly	38 %	35 %	13 %	16 %	3 %	4 %
The ability to enjoy playing and working with others	15 %	14 %	2 %	1 %	0 %	0 %
* Marked areas: Recommended elements in each school level						

As Table 4 shows, Collaboration on projects is overemphasized at all education levels. Its emphasis has even increased further at comprehensive and secondary school levels. Projects from the learner aspect has increased at polytechnics and universities. Surprisingly, nine per cent of teachers at comprehensive school have chosen Entrepreneurial business activity. Otherwise the column for comprehensive school is nicely set for the ideal.

**Table 4.** The central entrepreneurship elements taught at different education levels. Comparison for the years 2013 (Eskola et al. 2017'n.d., forthcoming) and 2017.

	Case 1: Comprehensive school		Case 2: Secondary school		Case 3: Polytechnics and universities	
	2013 n=20	2017 n=39	2013 n=23	2017 n=29	2013 n=18	2017 n=12
Entrepreneurship (percentage of choices)						
<i>number of choices</i>	37	70	43	51	35	25
Company management and business development	3 %	0 %	9 %	0 %	23 %	16 %
Entrepreneurial business activity	3 %	9 %	26 %	24 %	9 %	12 %
Learner-based projects	19 %	20 %	26 %	25 %	14 %	24 %
Collaboration on projects	30 %	36 %	21 %	35 %	37 %	28 %
Teamwork	41 %	31 %	19 %	16 %	17 %	16 %
Goal-oriented playing	5 %	4 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	4 %
* Marked areas: Recommended elements in each school level						

## 6. Discussion

The respondents were asked to choose two entrepreneurial education elements that are emphasized most in their organization. The data revealed that the central elements are not emphasized at the education levels as recommended by the pathway. As a result, some elements are repeated at almost all levels of education, while others are nearly absent.

The Tables 2 and 3 for Self-oriented entrepreneurship and Intrapreneurship show that the emphasis at all education levels is below ideal. At polytechnics and universities the emphasis has moved closer to the ideal. In 2013, Entrepreneurship was closer to the ideal. The emphasis should preferably be on the middle-most elements at secondary schools and at the lower elements at polytechnics and universities. However, higher-level education also emphasises projects, and it places less emphasis on correct business and company management, though it should in theory focus on these more advanced entrepreneurship elements.

The first research question asked, 'What are the central elements of entrepreneurship education at different education levels in Northern Ostrobothnia?' The findings show that at every level of education, the same elements are emphasised: for self-oriented entrepreneurship, this is being in charge of oneself and personal expertise; for intrapreneurship, this is the ability to work as a responsible team member; and for entrepreneurship, the elements are collaboration projects and teamwork.

The second research question asked whether there are changes in implementation of entrepreneurship education compared to year 2013. The number of respondents in this study is relatively small and one should be cautious in making conclusions.

The central self-oriented entrepreneurship elements (Table 2) and Intrapreneurship (Table3) are closer to the ideal compared to the previous survey, which is promising. On the other hand, regarding the elements of Entrepreneurship the situation is quite contrary.

Of the respondents 36% had participated in the strategy work. Thus, they are well informed what is expected of them answers, which may influence the outcome. This finding can be explained by a small number of respondents but also by the broad publicity throughout the work and large number of education personnel from several organizations involved in the process. Besides, the completed strategy process was widely informed in local media.

In summary, one year is a short time period in an education organization. It has been a year since the strategy was finished. During this time, the strategy content has been discussed in management of education organizations and municipalities. Decisions have been taken to include the entrepreneurship education strategy as a part of educational and year plans. These plans have been taken during this year and in most cases they will be implemented on the upcoming semesters.

## 7. Conclusions

Traditional company strategies are planned by the management and the challenge is how to implement the strategy in practice – in every level of organization. In our case the strategy was build up by using the

participatory strategy process. In spite of that it needs to be implemented. The amount of educational staff is more than 7100, so everybody was not able to take part to the strategy process.

Strategy has traditionally been regarded as a plan of the management should be deployed through participation (Pietilä 2015). Also this strategy should be deployed although it was created as a participatory process. The target group of the strategy is over 7,100 education employees in education organizations of Northern Ostrobothnia. Although not all individuals could be included in the strategy work, the finished strategy work and its visibility help the implementation later (Mantere, Vaara 2008). Also participation in the strategy content brought real content. The best experts of each subject matter were included in content creation.

The strategy has been processed in management boards of municipalities and education organizations. It would be beneficial to investigate what was decided in those meetings: whether the strategy is fully or partly incorporated into practices, or whether some content remains not be realized. Moreover, it would be interesting to follow how daily work of individual teachers are affected by the strategy.

Later, it would be interesting to investigate implementations of strategy based on the content. The educational education pathway base used as a reference in the present study is not identical to the content of Northern Ostrobothnia strategy. Representatives of different education levels could report on items related to their own work, which would enable follow-up and measurement of the strategy implementation.

A joint education education strategy work is finished and implementation continues. Like Jones and Matlay (2011) said, the realization of an entrepreneurship education strategy is best when there is a joint strategy as a guide for the work to be done.



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