Assiduous Study On Experiential Learning In Entrepreneurship Education With Reference To Higher Education In India

Dr. Rashmi Bhatia, Dr Arun Bhatia

Abstract: The aim of this research paper is to elucidate the role of experiential learning in Higher Education in India, specifically entrepreneurship education. The paper recommends that experiential learning is best expedited as a result of the learner’s participation in practical events, thus supporting the creation of understanding and their subsequent reflection on these experiences. The current practices in disseminating knowledge on entrepreneurship in Higher Education is analyzed, and the role experiential learning has to play. The Key Findings enumerate that by providing suitable experiential learning opportunities, educators can develop entrepreneurial capabilities in the students and aid in promoting an entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, it is also important on the onset, that students gain an understanding about entrepreneurship itself and the skills required to become an enterprising agent. This research paper provides reflection on the experiences and provides an opportunity for the (re)-evaluation and future enrichment in the area of experiential learning.

Keywords: Experiential learning, entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial skills, entrepreneurial knowledge, entrepreneurial ecosystem.

1. INTRODUCTION
The main purpose of Higher Education is about “developing a student's mind and potential to equip them to deal with the challenges posed in the real world” as suggested by Rand (2004), cited in Lowry & Turner (2007: 108). It can be logically stated that the procurement of suitable experience(s) must have a significant role to play here. The evaluation of this paper highlights What is meant by experiential learning? How the concept of experiential learning has evolved?, and Where and How this can be implemented? The paper also investigates entrepreneurship education, and explores whether experiential learning could be of prime importance here. It subsequently provides a real world example of how the teaching of entrepreneurship has developed and evolved in Higher Education, where entrepreneurship has been taught since 1998. The paper then goes on to evaluate if or how experiential learning has figured within this teaching. Finally, some conclusions and recommendations have been drawn for further study in the area of experiential learning for entrepreneurship education.

Experiential Learning Defined
Through Experiential learning one can identify changes required in their skills, attitudes and behaviors, and then implement those changes for better performance. In simple words, Experiential learning is learning by doing. We all have learned to walk or talk, not by being shown or told, but by practicing and refining our technique. The first walk had a stumble but with balance and practice we learnt how to walk. Our mentors were our parents then. The first word that came out was either Mama, Papa or Dada, and then the story roles. Slowly and slowly while we were given the words to speak, we started talking, then the school, college, the life taught us so much, so new words and depending upon our participation, many of us are in a position to talk effectively. Consequently, educators can apply this technique in varied situations with people from all ages. There are no barriers to age, education, experience, ability, background or culture. Experiential learning is defined as a process through which students develop the knowledge, the skills required, and basic values from out of the class experiences outside a traditional academic learning mode. It involves students in critical thinking, problem solving and decision making in areas that are personally relevant to them. This also holds creation of opportunities for ideas and skills through thorough proper feedback, observation, and the applicability of the ideas and skills to garner anew situations and outcomes. It consists of a variety of activities including Internships, Service learning, Project Dissertations, Study Abroad programs, and many other creative and professional work experiences. A Well-Planned, Administered and Assessed Experiential learning programs can trigger academic requirement by advocating Interdisciplinary Learning, Career Development, Cultural appreciation, Leadership, and many other professional and intellectual skills. Observation aids in processing the experience and making generalizations.

A Learning which is considered “experiential” contains all of the following elements:
1. Reflection, critical analysis and synthesis,
2. Opportunities for students to take initiative, decision making, and be liable for the results,
3. Opportunities for students to engage intellectually, creatively, emotionally, socially, or physically,
4. A possibility to learn from natural consequences, mistakes, and success(e.g. Stories of Successful Entrepreneurs).

Experiential learning is an educational approach that has been subjected to significant discussion and research within the confines of Higher Education. Dewey (1938) is often credited as laying the foundation to this paradigm, with his belief that all meaningful education comes through experience. Kolb (1984: 38) further mooted this idea where he described experiential learning as “the process by which knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences”. He recommended that there were four main components within a realm of learning - the concrete experience (feeling), reflection observation (reflection), abstract conceptualization (thinking) and active experimentation (doing). In other words, a student will move through this realm by “experiencing, reflecting, abstracting
and acting as they construct meaning from their experiences” (Baker et al., 2002: 52). These four components of Kolb’s learning cycle has been instrumental in transforming and internalization of a student’s learning process and that can help advocate an experiential learning experience. Elaborating further on the works of additional scholars (Dewey, Piaget and Jung, among others) in the field of experiential learning, Kolb (2005) encapsulated that these scholars share six propositions in their theories. Firstly, Learning as a process, a “continuing reconstruction of experience” (Dewey, 1916: 1). Secondly, it involves reworking on ideas and beliefs in order to fundamentally question these. Thirdly, learning removes conflicts; it is driven by disagreement and differences. Fourthly, learning is the adaptation to the world, how a person thinks, behaves, rationalizes decisions, and interprets the world around them. Fifthly, learning produces or initiates synergies between the person and their environment. Finally, knowledge is created from learning, initially social knowledge which is then translated into personal knowledge. To summarize, such settings allow students to withstand experience, question beliefs, resolve personal conflicts, adapt to the outside world, interact with the outside environment and create new intelligence. These doctrines provide a useful yardstick to evaluate proposed experiential learning environments. Therefore, in its simplest form, experiential learning aides a student with a new learning and the possibility to act on this learning with the outcome being a set of new skills or way of thinking in order to utilize this in a relevant situation. Beard and Wilson (2006: 2) explained that the external environment has a crucial role to play in this type of learning, i.e. “the sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment”. They further elaborated that active participation is key in experiential learning as a whole, and both internal and external needs to be involved. In other words, experiential learning is experienced out of the classroom. It should enable the learner to draw their own meaning, draw upon their own experiences and reflect on them. Moon (2004:165) states that experiential learning may not even involve the studying of textbooks or even a clearly defined curriculum. This is certainly an interesting proposition for educators. Experiential learning is not simply a mere recording of a student experiences (Kolb, 2005). The process of simply being aware of an experience does not necessarily imply the learning has been achieved. Baker et al. (2002: 57) provide a simple analogy of the process – it is similar to breathing – it follows a rhythm of breathing in, transforming and breathing out. A student should gain an experience, give it some meaning and express that in some form (thought, meaning or action). Therefore, students also have some responsibility towards this learning, they are not just passive participants but should be actively involved. Therefore, we can say that, experiential learning is a process (involving questioning, resolution of conflicts and reflection); it can break free from the traditional confines of classroom and curriculum and puts an onus on the student to be actively involved and take responsibility for this. The next logical step is to investigate how educators could attempt to develop this type of learning – What techniques are available to them? The open nature of experiential learning can perhaps make it difficult to decide what can be categorized as this type of learning, and what is merely participation as opined by Chapman et al. (1995: 243): “Simply taking part in a routine learning mode does not make it experiential. The experiential methodology is not like, circular, or follow a set pattern. It is a series of working principles….These principles are required no matter what activity the student is engaged in or where the learning takes place”…. Lewis and Williams (1994). Furman and Sibithorp (2013) went about to suggest some concrete examples of experiential techniques, which are Project Based Learning, Problem Based Learning, Cooperative Learning, Service Learning and Reflective Learning. Project Based Learning (PBL) is a teaching-learning method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects. Students work on a project for weeks or even a semester, working and solving a real-world problem or answering to a complex question. They demonstrate their knowledge and skills by creating a public product or presentation for a real audience, e.g designing an app or building a bridge where Students begin by studying the engineering of bridge building, comparing the construction of famous bridges such as the Golden Gate Bridge or Tower Bridge in London. Then they work in teams to construct bridges out of Popsicle sticks. The challenge is to get their bridge to hold five pounds (for younger students) or twenty pounds (for more advanced students). As a result, they develop deep insight by way of critical thinking abilities, participation, imaginativeness, and communication skills. Project Based Learning releases an endemic, creative power among students and teachers. Problem Based Learning on the other hand is a student-centric approach in which they learn about a subject by working in groups to solve an open-ended problem. This aides in driving the motivation and the learning. A well-designed Problem Based Learning project provides students with the opportunity to develop skills related to:
- Working in teams.
- Managing projects and holding leadership roles.
- Oral and written communication.
- Self-awareness and evaluation of group processes.
- Working independently.
- Critical thinking and analysis.
- Explaining concepts.
- Self-directed learning.
- Applying course content to real-world examples.
- Researching and information literacy.
- Problem solving across disciplines.

Cooperative Learning allows students to share and learn from each other’s experiences. Cooperative Learning practices help to bridge the gap. It is a form of active learning where students work together to perform specific tasks in a small group. E.g. in a group of 5-6 students, The Teacher poses initial problem or question. Firstly, the students are required to think individually of the answer; then, they share their thinking with their partner; then, the partnership shares their thinking with another partnership. Service learning is an educational method that integrates academic goals with community service projects. Lessons about relevant community issues are combined with existing course content to optimize the academic experience. E.g. through Rainwater Harvesting, Students will gain an understanding of the history, benefits, and
components of a rainwater harvesting system and partner with community members to design and build a rainwater harvesting system for their college, society. The students gain hands-on experience doing service projects to tackle community issues and make positive changes. Observation learning is an education form wherein the student discusses their learning experiences. John Dewey (1933), posited that reflective learning allowed people to connect ideas to past knowledge in order to solve problems, what they have read, done, or learned, relating the lesson at disposal with their own lives and making meaning out of the gamut. It's more than just memorizing some facts, formulas, or dates. So far, it has been examined what is meant by experiential learning and what kind of activities could potentially be employed to promote this. Now the question is Where this learning should take place or how should it be facilitated. Human beings mainly tend to make meaning from their experiences by discussion (Kolb, 2005). People make sense of their experiences by discussing them with others; by and large conversation is a “meaning-making process whereby understanding is achieved” (Baker et al., 2002: 53). However, a traditional classroom is not always conducive to this type of conversation and reflective behavior. Murphy (2010: 219) claims that teachers must be “open to new ways of accomplishing learning goals, with a stronger emphasis on creating learner-focused environments that allow for personal experiential learning activities”. She proposed that in today's digital age, technology can be employed to enhance this type of learning as the type of interaction taking place between learners often mimics the interaction that takes places on social networks. By allowing students to communicate in such a method that is familiar and approved by themselves, it allows them to encourage “experiential learning by allowing students to gain ownership of their ideas and communicate their ideas clearly” It also facilitates collaboration, which is fundamental to experiential learning by allowing students to interact with each other and share experiences. This is echoed in the works of Challis et al. (2005), where they refer to Boerner (1999) who proposed that technology can assist experiential learning in three ways: “Recording the experience for later reference, Creating a virtual community of participants (students, agencies, etc.), and Enabling new avenues for the community to reach its goals” (Boerner, as cited in Challis et al., 2005: 22). It is important, therefore, to understand what specific electronic mechanisms can enable this type of learning. These can include “electronic portfolios and journals as tools of reflection and knowledge construction in virtual environments” (Challis et al., 2005: 34), and also to “current and emerging social networking media (such as Weblogs, wiki, Flickr, and other self-publishing media)”, which “facilitate the formation of learning communities, foster student engagement and reflection” (Baird and Fisher, 2005). Experiential learning thus involves students understanding and taking responsibility for their learning. It also includes the interplay with the outside environment problems solving and change of mind-sets. In today's technology-dominated world, it is paramount to appreciate that technology can support the experiential learning process, it can be employed as a medium where students feel comfortable to exchange information and ideas and reflect upon this. The following evaluates to what extent the above mentioned experiential learning activities, participants and environment are appropriate to one specific type of education, namely entrepreneurship education. Building Bridge Between Experiential Learning And Entrepreneurship Education It is quite logical to assume that entrepreneurship education should involve some practical touch, and therefore must include experiential learning opportunities. It is with this aid of experiential learning that makes this type of education unique and, potentially even determines its success. According to Haase and Lautenschläger (2011: 145), entrepreneurship education “should desist from simply teaching knowledge on business creation and rather focus on experiencing entrepreneurship”. Bliemel (2014a) had the same viewpoint, and referred to other commentators (Rasmussen & Sorheim, 2006; Haase & Lautenschlager, 2011; Neck & Greene, 2011; Rideout & Gray, 2013; Mason & Arshed, 2013) who all agree on this point, namely that in order to succeed, entrepreneurship education requires experiential components. Bliemel quips that the challenge resides in the students being able to “apply the core concepts or become more prepared for the reality that awaits them outside the classroom”, which undoubtedly requires an experiential element. He explains that there are currently two methods of experiential learning offered to students of entrepreneurship – (a) learning by placing the students in an actual business e.g Internships, and (b) learning by working on their own ideas (with guidance from suitable mentors- both faculties and Industry experts). “Flipped classroom” i.e. where coursework is evaluated at home and exercises (similar to homework) are conducted in the classroom, should be introduced and practiced, adds Bliemel. He suggests that this is similar to a Business Accelerator model whereby mentors are assigned early in the process and their role “moves from being directive to coaching, encouraging and questioning”. There is shift of interest in that the student's role in the classroom moves from copying information from slides or other formats to actually doing; they use the classroom hours to work on aspects of their business model, update their website, produce a product demo video, etc. The objective is to make students “learn entrepreneurship” in an “experiential environment”, and not just “learn about entrepreneurship” (Bliemel, 2014a: 127). His approach had received positive feedback and evaluation from his students, and has thus become a role model which is being widely practiced not only in India but across the globe. In fact the governing bodies on education like UGC and AICTE in India, have made it compulsory for the colleges and Institutions to have an Incubation center set up under the guidance of the faculties and Industry experts who will be guiding the budding entrepreneurs of tomorrow in the business unit. Students are given the opportunity to “see, touch and feel entrepreneurship” by working along with other entrepreneurs on a business development project. This has given better results since the learning has actually been obtained from outside the classroom. Do the students also need an understanding of other aspects, for example, the context in which they are operating? Is it also important to learn about the background and theory of entrepreneurship? Why is it important to society and what type of skills are typically required? Theoretical Questions like these are addressed in the classroom teaching. Since, according to Rasmussen and Sorheim (2006), students
also need to learn about the phenomena as well as gaining the skills. As noted by Hytti (2002), entrepreneurship education need to involve learning about understanding entrepreneurship as well as the skills (Experimental) to become more entrepreneurial. Kurczewska (2011) refers to the work of Klofsten (2000) where he claims that there are both static and dynamic aspects of entrepreneurial education. The static component focuses on the theory of entrepreneurship (Class Room Teaching) and the dynamic approach applies this knowledge (Practical aspect - Experiential). The theory of entrepreneurship can be effectively conveyed by the Faculty, providing the context for why and how the skills are important. In addition to all this, students should also take responsibility for their own learning. Further supported by current theories on How to become a successful entrepreneur, namely those of Aulet (2013) and Ries (2011) where they maintain that a successful entrepreneur is no longer a lone ranger, an individual on their own, but is part of a multi-faceted team. This is echoed in the work of Van de Ven (1993: 213), proposes that “entrepreneurs who run in packs are more successful than those that do it alone”. This holds well for current education models which often focus on working in groups with a view to developing teamwork skills such as effective communication, negotiation, persuasion, conflict resolution among others. cannot be ignored. This has been highlighted by O’Donnell et al. (2001) who suggests that the ability to network is seen as a fundamental to entrepreneurial skill. This social aspect to networking can be promoted in many ways, e.g. setting of group assignments, allowing students to forge their own relationships, enforcing self-management of conflict, provision and acceptance of advice, brainstorming, work in groups etc. By engaging students in such activities, may increase the likelihood of success in developing these networking skills in students (Smith and Lohrke, 2008). Similarly, the work of Flack et al. (2012: 39) establishes the role of interaction with likeminded peers i.e. other individuals having a similar entrepreneurial mindset and retorts that “having an entrepreneurial peer group has a positive effect on an individual’s entrepreneurial intentions”. Gentry (1990) states that teaching and learning pedagogies with group interactions and assignments have been instrumental in increased experiential learning. This development and support of an entrepreneurial ecosystem has been important for many educators to date, as outlined in the work of Engel and Charron (2006) and Moylan et al. (2008). It can be summarized from above anecdotes that there are three components to entrepreneurship education: (a) the acquisition of knowledge (Theory), (b) the development of an entrepreneurial support system (Incubator) and (c) the building of entrepreneurial skills (Experiential Learning). By incorporating suitable learning activities such as use of Concrete examples, Simulations, projects, field studies etc., and by allowing students to move outside the, educators can try to provide the understanding of the context of entrepreneurship and imbibe the necessary skills. The conducive environment is achieved with the help of the entrepreneurial support system and by encouraging students to network and collude with each other. The Students can work in groups which can be self-selected. The emphasis on teams is deliberate and reflects findings of Aulet (2013), Reiss (2011) and Van de Ven (1993) in relation to the importance of team building for entrepreneurial ventures. This challenges the mythical preconception of an entrepreneur as a sole superhero, and reinforces the importance of a team mindset for successful entrepreneurship. In their teams, students come up with ideas for suitable products or services to sell, and follow up with research on the market and potential customers. They then plan the operation - they organize all of the logistics – finance, product, display and merchandising, floats, etc. They sell at their appointed times, and afterwards, they are required to evaluate their financial and overall performance. This collaboration can also happen digitally, since this can promote thinking and reflection in a familiar environment and also stimulate experiential learning. The student has also a significant role to play in this learning. Therefore, it can be concluded that in the chase of experiential learning, entrepreneurship education should focus on employing learning activities that forge students to build a support network and subsequent entrepreneurial skills, while understanding how and why this is placed within the context of entrepreneurship itself. In fact, Wadhwa (2013) suggested that timing is very crucial and that “The key is to provide education at “teachable moments” – when the entrepreneur is thinking about starting a venture or ready to scale it.” Another experiential learning project is the Social Enterprise Project, which requires students to research and develop a business proposition for a social enterprise, keeping in mind the value it adds to the society rather than making profit for the owners and shareholders. Apart from market research and developing the value proposition, the students are engaged with piloting a practical aspect of the business that they have selected. For instance, students can develop a social enterprise business concept designed to educate the elderly on how to use social media. Thus, students engage in an academic learning exercise that combines the theory and processes learnt in the classroom and conforms to Kurczewska’s (2011) three dimensions on teaching entrepreneurship – doing so, students learn to understand social entrepreneurship, learn to act as a social entrepreneur while being encouraged to become more entrepreneurial in how they approach their project. Such a project per say, can be valuable in integrating students with the wider, local community, and has been a particularly good way of embedding and assessing the ‘competence-insight’ learning outcome for business as set out in the National Framework of Qualifications (Moylan, 2013). Experiential projects in marketing and sales, use of social media and information technology have been tried and introduced, and now assessment is making greater use of digital technology to facilitate learning. Students are developing websites, social media campaigns and engage directly with a multitude of platforms to promote their business ideas, which is assisting with the development of networking skills which O’Donnell et al. (2001) has deemed to be a fundamental entrepreneurial skill, with the inclusion of guest lecturers from local and national entrepreneurs, business mentoring clinics, business plan competitions, employer forums and internship opportunities. The teaching, learning and assessment approach draws on a wide range of the learning activities that are linked to Kolb’s experiential learning cycle. EvaluationThe four components identified by Kolb (2005), makes the entrepreneurship
students move through the cycle by “experiencing, reflecting, abstracting and acting as they construct meaning from their experiences” (Baker et al., 2002: 52). Throughout the practical elements of their studies, students undergo experiences; they often question their beliefs and regularly have to resolve personal conflict and interact with the outside environment. In developing this approach, it has been discovered that interaction with the external environment is extremely important; this concurs with Beard and Wilson’s (2006) contention that the role of the outside environment has a crucial role to play in experiential learning. However, this cannot take place in the classroom. In this context the role of the teacher shifts – the teacher becomes a facilitator more than a lecturer. At times it echoes Moon’s (2004) observation that text books are not studied –students rarely consult books to check how to go about trading in a market place, and the introduction of an opportunity to trade in-class and on campus prior to the real experience can be particularly useful in assisting students to identify potential pitfalls. The students need to take responsibility for their learning and this can also be linked to the way in which we facilitate students to make meaning from the experience. There is undoubtedly some capacity to engage more with technology to allow students to both collaborate with other students and to share meaning and make sense of their learning, as recommended by Murphrey (2010).

Conclusions And Recommendations
Taking part in Entrepreneurship Education conferences, reflecting on and presenting one’s own practice and undertaking specific targeted training initiatives at national and international level, leads to the development of an environment that is conducive to reflection on our own work as it relates to practice in the field. There is need to formally capture the experiences of the faculties that have been central to the implementation of experiential learning opportunities and to document the practices that have evolved in terms of teaching, learning and assessment for entrepreneurship education.

REFERENCES


