Title: Social Entrepreneurship and Experiential Learning

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Abstract:
Social enterprises and entrepreneurship are about accountability not just to commercial imperatives but to the wide range of stakeholders in a social enterprise, potentially an area of great tension. Social responsibility is about a commitment to society or community, entrepreneurship is usually understood to provide a business outlook on the enterprise – it needs to be sustainable commercially and balanced carefully.
To educate the modern or millennial learner (born after about 1980 and grappling with burgeoning youth needs for creative employment development) into developing a small to medium enterprise with a social responsibility, modern postgraduate coursework programs have looked closely at experiential learning. This provides a transformative learning through workplace-based projects and strategic business conceptualising. This paper will include a case study of two postgraduate coursework units New Ventures in Creative Enterprise, and Building Creative Teams, part of a Masters in Communication/Creative Enterprise. These provide experiential learning about strategic planning for startup creative businesses, and work-based projects which build on interpersonal skills for ongoing success.

Key words: social entrepreneurship, social enterprises, millennial learners, experiential learning, postgraduate coursework

Karen Le Rossignol enjoys the challenge of creatively developing writing and production solutions for learning. She teaches creative and professional writing at the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University in Melbourne in the postgraduate coursework areas of New Ventures in Creative Enterprise and Building Creative Teams for project work. A freelance writer who has also been running a creative freelance business for more than twelve years, she has extensive experience with industry projects, and has an educational background in secondary and higher education environments. Her focus has been on developing creatively engaging virtual scenarios and projects that replicate workplace-based writing situations. She is interested in the new generation learner, with particular emphasis on how their learning styles may increase their engagement in experiential learning through postgraduate live work projects and creative industry freelancing and/or businesses.

Title: Social Entrepreneurship and Experiential Learning

Introduction

The social enterprise is a twenty first century-style business which encourages a sustainable approach, through ethical and environmentally responsible commitments to social values. The social entrepreneur is more likely to be the millennial learner born post-1980, and their needs in learning about developing the social enterprise, or in fact any business venture, have adjusted through exposure to media literacies and the internet, to a more socially connected and experiential approach. This paper explores how educators are developing postgraduate courses to meet these needs in a more time-relevant and transformational way.

Social Responsibility, Entrepreneurs and Enterprises

There is not only a global movement towards Corporate Social Responsibility in multinational organizations (see for example EPCOR, NVIDIA or Huntsman Corporation relevant website areas in the reference list), there is also a clearer articulation of Social Enterprise as a valid and burgeoning business model through such social values businesses as Body Shop and Timberland. When then UK Prime Minister Tony Blair launched the government social enterprise strategy in November 2006, he said he had 'a vision of strong social purpose combined with entrepreneurial drive. Of robust businesses that could be highly responsive to customers and compete in the marketplace – but driven by a public service ethos and a cast-iron commitment to social goals'. In 2008 now UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown states '…Today, there is a trinity of aims: fairness, prosperity and environmental care. If our economy is to flourish, if our communities are to become more closely knit, and if we are to take care of the natural environment and the resources on which our economic activity depends, we must find new and more equitable ways of doing business that are better suited to the times we live in now.'… (Startups, May 2008).

Social enterprises have become a growth industry. The 2005 Annual Survey of Small Businesses UK '… found that there are 55,000 social enterprises in the UK with a combined turnover of £27 billion. Social enterprises account for 5% of all businesses with employees, and contribute £8.4 billion per year to the UK economy.' (Social

Enterprise UKa, 2008). Social entrepreneurs are recognized as a significant part of the UK labour force, with almost 1.3 million people (3.4% of the working age population) considering themselves as social entrepreneurs. They are interested in social ventures, with almost 12% of early stage entrepreneurs starting a social venture or enterprise. (Delta Economics in July 2008, from Social Enterprise UKb, 2008). The same research also indicates that 35% of all entrepreneurs who have been involved in start-up activity for less than three months in the UK are social entrepreneurs.

So what exactly is a social enterprise? **Social enterprises** share key qualities of a standard business: they produce goods or provide services. However they also have social aims and ethical values integrated into the business, and they are self-sustaining, not depending on donations to survive. Compiling an historical overview and current practice within an Australian context, the Adelaide Central Mission (ACM) defines social enterprise as

> '...a means by which people come together and use market-based ventures to achieve agreed social ends. It is characterized by creativity, entrepreneurship, and a focus on community rather than individual profit. It is a creative endeavour that results in social, financial, service, educational, employment, or other community benefits.'(Talbot et al 2002 p2)

People wishing to start a social enterprise need entrepreneurial skills such as initiative, flexibility and responsibility. They are concerned to generate creative ideas, to plan and manage the processes in a startup business. They also need the ability to negotiate, to solve conflicts and to continue to monitor their performance. These social innovators are entrepreneurs who are looking for highly specific skills development, both through traditional sources such as specifically industry skills-based postgraduate coursework programs, and through workplace-based learning – learning from projects, mentors and networks.

Education, Learning and Social Innovation
Where earlier generations used education, and in particular tertiary education, to change their future, today's students do not perceive clear choices, nor models for change. They are looking for relevance and timeliness, as well as a community of knowledge.

Higher Education in the Learning Society, a report on the future of the Higher Education sector in the United Kingdom, foreshadows the creation of a society committed to learning throughout life (Dearing 1997). This report indicates the development of a culture of disciplined thinking, which would encourage curiosity, challenge existing ideas and generate new ones, as a key area to target for the future. Dearing envisages the learning society as one that enables individuals to reach their highest potential, allowing them to grow intellectually, become well equipped for work, make a contribution to society and achieve personal fulfilment.

Atkins (in Crebert *et al.* 2004) suggests research has identified that 'graduates in the [twenty-first] century are likely to be knowledge workers and symbolic analysts, service providers, members of learning organisations, and managers of their own careers' (p. 150). The ability to be adaptable, and able to change with the requirements of their careers, is therefore an important graduate attribute for the millennial learner. It is, of course, blended with other attributes as indicated by statements such as the following taken from the Deakin University 2009 Handbook:

> ...All Deakin programs will encourage students to develop attitudes of intellectual curiosity and motivation for independent thinking, autonomous learning and reflective professional and personal practice, and a commitment to ethical and sustainable practices. Appropriate to its level of study and discipline composition, each program will be designed to ensure that students develop their knowledge and understanding as well as a range of generic skills (Deakin University 2008).

The link with Dearing's (1997) vision of curiosity that challenges ideas and generates new ones within a learning society is inherent in the above statement. The mix of generic and specific skills incorporates ethical and sustainable practices, which are vital components of social enterprise.

Social Innovation refers to new strategies, concepts, ideas and organisations that meet social needs of all kinds – from working conditions and education to community development and health. There are practical steps to make social entrepreneurship and social innovation work. Mark Henley from Uniting*Care* Wesley Adelaide provided some reflections on these at the History and Future of Social Innovation Conference 19-21 June 2008 in Adelaide. He talked of the need for passion from the entrepreneur, the

commitment to both community concern and practical, pragmatic and innovative strategies.

The social entrepreneur of the twenty first century can be tracked statistically to a point. Using the UK summary from the website PROWESS (PROWESS, 2008) as a starting point, it is clear that women are driving social enterprises and entrepreneurial activities in many interesting ways. Considering the motivations for starting a business, 54% of women start a business so they can choose what hours they work, compared to only 35% of men (source: Women & Men Business Owners in the United Kingdom). In 2003 there was an increase of 27% in the number of women who felt they had the skills to start a business (source: Achieving the Vision, Female Entrepreneurship British Chambers of Commerce, July 2004). Looking at the statistics/reports globally, around 30% of all US businesses are majority female owned. The number of women-owned businesses continues to grow at twice the rate of all US firms, and they are increasing in economic positioning. Between 1991 and 1996 the number of self-employed women in Canada grew by 44% (compared to 20% for men). In 2004, the average level of female total entrepreneurial activity (TEA) rate across the 34 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) countries varied from 39.1% in Peru to 1.2% in Japan (source: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2004 Report on Women and Entrepreneurship).

Interestingly, female entrepreneurs are more likely to develop a product of service unfamiliar to the market, to have fewer competitors, and they are more likely to be using technology in their products or services than their male counterparts. In addition they are more likely than male businesses to be offering a product or service to the market that has been developed in the last year (source: Achieving the Vision, Female Entrepreneurship British Chambers of Commerce, July 2004)

It is amongst the 18-24 age group that individuals are most likely to think that entrepreneurship is a good career choice and that it has a high status in society (84% compared to the 75% in the next age group) (source: The Enterprise Report 2005: Making Ideas Happen; Enterprise Insight, 2005). Finally, every week around 550 businesses are launched by young entrepreneurs under 25, which represent 7% of all start-ups in England and Wales (source: The Enterprise Report 2005: Making Ideas Happen; Enterprise Insight, 2005). Entrepreneurial activity amongst people with no

formal education is very high in the 18-24 year old age group (14.2%). For the 18-24 year old age group, entrepreneurial activity is twice as high in this category as it is for any other qualification level (source: Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, GEM, Jan 2004)

There are three themes in developing entrepreneurial learning: personal and social emergence as an entrepreneur; contextual learning through developing opportunities from current experiences; and negotiating the enterprise, interacting with others to create ventures. (Rae, 2007)

So, is this social enterprise model the business direction for the 21st century? The clear question facing the educationalist is how to develop and encourage the relevant skills in the learner who has come from the 'net generation', the millennial learner who is the potential social entrepreneur.

Challenging the Millennial Learner

According to Oblinger (2008), today's learners are connected and experiential. She suggests a breadth of access to social networks: MySpace (3rd most popular site in the United States), Facebook (85 per cent market share among fourth year university students in the United States) and Flickr (46 million visitors per month as of April 2008). Such sites not only provide a social network but also a potential immersive learning environment. This is a participatory culture, with a sense of collective intelligence – everyone has something to contribute. Knowledge is created not possessed, and it is possible to use a community rather than an individual to gain knowledge. The millennial learner sees experiences as more important than the acquisition of information.

This learner also values **work-based learning**. Trigwell and Reid (1998) provide a description of work-based learning as:

> a range of educational practices which involves students learning in authentic work settings. The curriculum is significantly influenced by issues and challenges which emerge from the exigencies of work rather than predetermined academic content driven requirements (p. 142).

Action learning, as a part of work-based learning which works through group tasks and problem-solving methodologies, provides opportunities to develop strategies and take action, then capture what has been learned in a dynamic and collaborative way

(Marquardt 2007). Today's learner comes from a connected generation which constructs knowledge in a nonlinear way, starting from the known or concrete, then moving informally through more lateral mosaic-style developments. A contextual learning space developed using the principles of connectivity and experiential learning can provide socialisation, exploration and conversations that reflect on the learning. It is reflection on that connectivity, in non-linear ways, which leads to effective experiential learning.

As Kolb (1983) has stated in *Experiential Learning*, 'Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (p. 41). According to Silberman (2007), experiential learning incorporates a direct involvement at emotional and intellectual levels, using projects or work-based activities that are very similar to or replicate workplace experiences. This transformative experience potentially requires immersive and imaginative simulations and situations to bring the learning closer to the day-to-day workplace experiences, particularly in aspects such as interpersonal skills and communications.

Dede (2005) describes immersion as participating in a comprehensive and realistic experience. This situated learning needs to build in the transfer of knowledge learned in one situation to another, leading to improved performance in a real-world setting. Immersion incorporates mediation (an expert guide) to develop reflection, and to identify the importance of transfer. Transfer is also strongly linked to work-based or problem-based learning, provision of authentic work settings within which to transfer the learning.

The Net Generation or Millennial Learner
Learner-centred learning requires knowing the expectations of the learner, and building into the blend of learning design methods that allow an environment for learners to make mistakes and correct them (a form of active problem solving). The strong engagement can be developed by engaging multiple senses creatively.

Characteristics of the generations currently in some aspect of the learning cycles and workplaces, as facilitator, lecturer, designer, student, worker, team leader or entrepreneur are summarized below from the analysis of Arnsparger (2008), who is considering intergenerational issues and individuals in a range of roles as colleagues, cohorts and customers:

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World War II Generation (born before 1940)	Strong commitment to families, communities and country
	Values and strong work ethic currently influence policies and practices in the workplace
	Experience, discipline, stability, loyalty, focus
	See work as a privilege
	Motivated by: seeing actions affecting overall good of organization, respect for their knowledge and experience, rewards for their perseverance and work ethic
Baby Boomers (1940s-1960s)	Taught to get along with others
	Primary force behind workplace practices like participative management, quality circles and teambuilding
	Continuing to work through retirement years
	Committed to work, good team members
	Optimistic, future-oriented, strong experience and knowledge
	Motivated by: leaders who get them involved in making a difference, managers who value their opinion and recognize their contributions
Generation X (1960s-1980s)	Largest percentage of today's workforce
	Learned to be independent with parents working
	Willing to work outside the rules/system
	Self-reliant, willing to work hard, but want life beyond work
	Motivated by: being given freedom to get jobs done to their time or in their way, having few rules, being more informal than 'corporate'
Millenials (1980 to 2000) sometimes called Generation Y or Net Generation	1st generation growing up surrounded by digital media
	Connected to friends, parents, information and entertainment
	Technologically experienced with global worldview
	Ability to multitask

Goal and achievement oriented, willing to work hard, expect support provided for achieving

Motivated by: managers connecting their actions to personal/career goals, promise of working with other bright, creative people, having time and flexibility for lifestyle

Summarized from Arnsparger (2008)

The Net Generation learning preferences, according to Prensky, (quoted in Dziuban and Moskal 2008) tend towards active learning, blending graphics with resources, clear and relevant connections incorporated in the design, multitasking rather than singular or linear approaches, technology utilized as a friend, and the integration of gaming and fantasy concepts within learning environments. These preferences lead to both opportunities and challenges in structuring learner-centred approaches to this generation.

The Best Blends of Learning

Blended learning, as discussed here, assumes an interactivity based on the learner rather than the teacher. Inherent in blended learning is a responsibility for learning which is active rather than passive. The learner takes responsibility, in fact can shape or co-create their own learning, but this requires an engagement and commitment from the learner. The Net Generation learner seems to be comfortable with blended learning which focuses on collaboration and networking, whether it is people or technology based. For best effect, it needs to be just-in-time blends which may be directive or more discovery-oriented, formal or informal (Rossett, Douglis & Frazee 2003). The key is that the information is readily available for collective blending in the learning project/s, task/s or outcomes.

In constructing experiential learning programs, presented in the case studies that follow, the developer has endeavoured to establish a reflective practice that encourages deep learning. Case study 1 (New Ventures in Creative Enterprise) uses an oral client pitch presentation describing the creative enterprise, in which students evaluate and analyse the validity of their business idea or innovative approach. Case study 2 (Building Creative Teams) uses a major group oral presentation as well as an individual report to the leader/mentor of the unit for the work project. Through establishing such mechanisms for

reflection there is a much stronger potential for engagement of the learner. For, as noted by Boud *et al.* (in Smith *et al.* 2007):

> Learning builds on and flows from experience: no matter what external prompts to learning there might be – teachers, materials, interesting opportunities – learning can only occur if the experience of the learner is engaged (p. 132).

Transformative learning within the context of work projects is about providing opportunities for learners to reflect deeply..

This is not a vocational model built only from industry drivers: the students are applying the theory to the research required to engage themselves emotionally and intellectually with their targeted industry sector. They see the relevance of the skills, they apply the theory and they learn more deeply – the information transforms into a knowledge base they take with them to other organizations, or to their own.

The blends considered in the development of the case studies for the Masters in Communication discussed below have explored:

- The integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based online approaches
- The combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment
- The combination of a number of pedagogic approaches, irrespective of learning technology use (Oliver and Trigwell, 2005).

Taking Risks: New Ventures in Creative Enterprise
This postgraduate unit provides a framework for taking risk, developing entrepreneurial skills through planning frameworks which challenge the learner to strategise and evaluate. Learners propose a business idea, develop the key elements of the business plan to see if the idea might work, then pitch the full business proposal to a given audience to test it.

In 2005, the unit provided 24 micro or small business ideas, ranging from a graphic design company through team building camps in Bali to the management of events such as weddings, and adventure tours in Kashmir. Along the way there were tea bars, restaurants and freelance writers/editors.

By 2006 there were 39 business ideas. Film/video production companies provided community documentaries, editing assistance and self-help training; there were more niche restaurants, tapas bars and coffee/dessert shops. One of the more entrepreneurial ideas was an open air traveling film venue in Mexico, bringing arthouse to unusual locations. Of these approximately one third are now operating businesses.

In 2007 there were once more 24 business ideas. There was more focus on communications and PR/advertising agencies, with websites featuring as a major marketing tool. Of these, at least two were already operational businesses prior to the delivery of the unit, with their start-up owners looking at what they needed to do strategically to survive.

Finally in 2008, 27 business concepts were delivered, and these focused even more strongly on the independence of the social entrepreneur. There was the fresh and healthy food café; the online clothes company importing African designs/manufacture and providing celebrity modeling of the clothes and the cause; the community of information managers linked by a website business. Many of these businesses are seeing the importance of the bridge between larger organizations, targeting the market niches which highlight communication and community.

Learners complete this unit with a belief in their ability to assess and evaluate business ideas, and confidence that they can think strategically about how to position their business. They have strong planning structures, but they also listen to and reflect on a range of oral presentations and learn transformatively from other entrepreneurs in their learning group. They become very excited by the opportunities!

Experiential Learning – Building Creative Teams and *Exposure*
This case study was a postgraduate coursework unit, with a group of 15 international and local students involved in working in teams constructed for the semester long unit. The blended learning approach involved setting up a workplace-oriented context, the mythical Gibbering Communications Agency, which was responsible for pitching ideas to the client (the coordinator of the *Exposure* performing and creative arts season) regarding the promotion and launch of the *Exposure* program. The project teams were established using the following learning styles and project management tools/questionnaires:

* Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire: this questionnaire indicates four learning approaches within which learners (and in this case team members) operate comfortably – activist, reflector, pragmatist and theorist (see www.peterhoney.com for details on the LSQ and interpretations of individual types)

* Belbin Self Perception Inventory: this questionnaire indicates the nine team roles and how they contribute to a team. Most people operate within 3-4 team roles, and these can be adapted depending on the situation. Check the website (www.belbin.com) or Belbin (2004) for details on the nine team roles.

These tools (and a skills audit administered by Sheila Gibbering a.k.a the mediator/lecturer/project manager in charge of this experiential learning project) provided the basis for establishing the teams. The teams were deliberately set up with a mix of skills and backgrounds, learning styles and management or leadership qualities, including quite divergent English language skills. In fact, the teams - which were guaranteed to have friction, to test their abilities to work together – had a very strong risk factor of failure.

The learners ranged in age from 22 to 28 years old, and came from eight different countries and learning approaches – Thailand, China, Uzbekhistan, Norway, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Australia. Their expectations were to negotiate with a creative community of performing arts students and staff to produce the launch, the enewsletter and promotional website, and the archives produced as a short film capturing the workplace project. They were studying in the Master of Communication, a program which allows a broad selection of study (and therefore an eclectic mix of skills) within streams – public relations, advertising, journalism, film/video/photography, and professional creative writing.

The media technologies and experiential contexts became the drivers of the students' learning, rather than the information in print and online, or the educational 'expert' or authority.

Although there were many in each team who had come from traditional teacher-directed learning models, they adapted almost instantly to collective sharing of experiences to

pool their information. Whether in skills or knowledge-based learning areas, they were comfortable in using the team as a learning tool.

The sense of excitement at working with a live project lasted the length of the *Exposure* launch and promotion, despite mixed success in achieving the outcomes. The excitement was leavened with realistic reflection, in a classic action learning approach – the teams were all learning immersively about group dynamics and team learning models, incorporating assessments which were a part of the project outcomes rather than an adjunct tool (ie team presentations were captured in a range of media, written reports and e-portfolios, action plans and scheduling tools and websites).

There were regular opportunities for reflection, both in individual surveys and in public team and individual presentations. Comments from students have indicated that their learning was exponential and applied. The action learning approach enabled reflection during the project, and resulting amendments to achieve better outcomes. The combination of outcomes-based learning and reflection/communication through a range of social technologies demonstrated the students' satisfaction with the process.

Conclusion

From 114 business ideas over four years, and four teams reflecting on not just outcomes/events but the interpersonal and communication skills required in immersive workplace-based experiences, there is now a group of millennial learners from this program who are excited about the opportunities of new enterprises and creative problem-solving. They feel much better prepared for a twenty first century business model which requires their personal and social emergence as an entrepreneur, with passion for their product or service and a commitment to the community in which that enterprise is based. They have a context which is linked both to their own immersive experiences and to the forecast workplace or social enterprise. They are now ready to negotiate from a position of greater engagement and analysis, networked to interact with others and create their socially and strategically sustainable enterprise.

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