

# Developing entrepreneurship skills in children and teenagers

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## DEVELOPING ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS IN CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Entrepreneurship is commonly associated with economic growth and development. As such, there is vast literature on the topic concerning the entrepreneurship process, the entrepreneurs' innate and acquired characteristics, and the process of teaching entrepreneurship, among other fundamental issues. The literature regarding entrepreneurship education, however, is mostly focused on adults. Yet, several studies positively relate to the probability of becoming an entrepreneur with familiar background, namely the existence of close relatives, such as parents or uncles/ aunts that are or have been entrepreneurs. This might suggest that stimuli during childhood and adolescence might have an important effect on the odds of an individual becoming an entrepreneur. Therefore, entrepreneurship education of young children and teenagers might be a relevant field of research. This paper aims to analyse how entrepreneurship is taught to children and teenagers at an international private school located in Porto, Portugal, that has an innovative approach with regard to this.*

**Key words:** education; children; teenagers; entrepreneurship

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Europe has been striving to keep its place in the world economy while facing problems such as financial and political crisis, high unemployment rates, slow growth rates, aging population, and de-globalisation. In this context, the entrepreneurial activity is an important engine for economic growth and job creation. Entrepreneurship not only creates new companies and jobs, but also opens new markets and fosters development of new skills and capabilities (European Commission, 2013).

According to the European Commission (2013), to get back to growth and lower unemployment rates, Europe needs more entrepreneurs. As such, the European Union has been committed to promoting entrepreneurship education in its member states (Paço & Palinhas, 2011). Empirical literature backs this political decision since it suggests that, by developing entrepreneurial competences, as well as a positive perception about the need and the viability of the entrepreneurial activity, entrepreneurship education contributes to an increase of the number of entrepreneurs (Raposo, Ferreira, Paço, & Rodrigues, 2008).

In fact, empirical studies show that entrepreneurship education positively influences entrepreneurial intentions on adults (Hansemark, 1998; Hatten & Ruhland 1995). Moreover, research shows that early formal entrepreneurship education increases children's propensity for choosing entrepreneurship as a career when they become adults (Paço, Ferreira, Raposo, Rodrigues, & Dinis, 2011).

Undeniably, it seems to be a consensus that entrepreneurship education is fundamental to shaping an innovative and dynamic society, and that 'ad hoc efforts' are not 'sufficient to build a strong entrepreneurial culture' (Raposo et al., 2008, p. 486). European educational systems could therefore be improved by including entrepreneurship education in school curriculums from Lower School through University (Paço et al., 2011).

This paper aims to describe the first findings in a research project that intends to study and improve the methodology used to develop entrepreneurial skills in children and teenagers at an international school in Porto, Portugal.

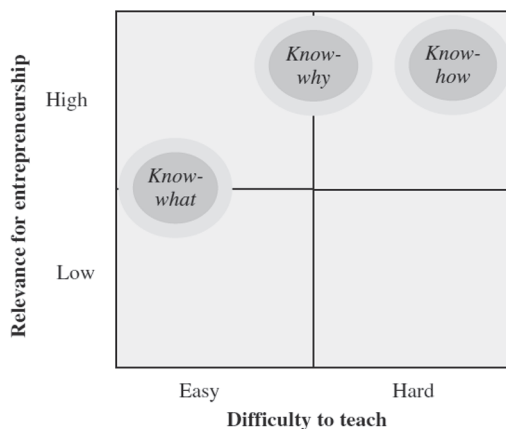
## 2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Over the past decades, entrepreneurship education has advanced considerably (Naia, Batista, Januário, & Trigo, 2015). Its development started in the Anglo-Saxon countries, such as in the United States and in the United Kingdom, where modern entrepreneurship education dates back to the 1980s. Over the past 30 years, it has spread widely around the world. It has first developed substantially in Western Europe and, more recently, progressively in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America (Haase & Lautenschlager, 2011).

This geographic expansion has been accompanied by an increasing assortment of pedagogic approaches and a growing number of courses. (Naia et al., 2015). In this process, entrepreneurship teaching at universities has gained increasing importance (Haase & Lautenschlager, 2011). Further, entrepreneurship has become a well-established academic discipline and a legitimate course of study (Naia et al., 2015) at all educational levels.

Nevertheless, the discussion about entrepreneurship education is far from over, as until recently researchers have mainly focused on describing the concept of entrepreneurship instead of developing a theory to help potential entrepreneurs (Fiet, 2000). Consequently, there seems to be a gap between what entrepreneurship students are taught and what aspiring entrepreneurs need to know to boost the odds of starting a new venture (Edelman, Manolova, & Brush, 2008). In reality, scholars are still debating what 'entrepreneurship education' should be and stands for. Haase and Lautenschlager (2011) highlight the need to discuss the appropriate focus and pedagogies for entrepreneurship education as there seems to be excessive heterogeneity regarding the philosophy, objectives, content, methodologies, and effectiveness of entrepreneurship teaching. In a literature review, these authors identified the most commonly used methodologies and pedagogies in entrepreneurship education. They concluded that the most prevalent pedagogies are the creation of business plans, the analysis of case studies, and interviews with entrepreneurs, as well as class lectures, readings, and guest speakers. Also acknowledged in the literature as entrepreneurship education methodologies are business visits, field trips, internships, working with entrepreneurs, and the development of actual business startups. However, according to Solomon, Duffy, and Tarabishy (2002), in the United States, on the one hand, the invitation of guest speakers, the instigation of class debates, and the use of technology have increased dramatically, and, on the other hand, conventional methodologies such as lectures are becoming less frequent, while the development of business plans is still very popular among entrepreneurship educators.

But, apparently, the biggest challenge faced by entrepreneurship educators and scholars is what Haase and Lautenschlager (2011) have identified as the "teachability dilemma". In fact, although the importance of teaching the entrepreneurial knowledge has long been recognised, that particular knowledge is apparently very tough to teach, as the soft skills involved are very difficult to develop. Haase and Lautenschlager (2011) group entrepreneurial knowledge in three fields: entrepreneurial 'know-what', 'know-how', and 'know-why', and they alert that "as they are often lacking or underdeveloped, measures to promote and instil them rank high in the economic-political agenda" (p. 146). The authors explain that hard skills, like those related to business creation and management, are taken for granted. These technical skills (know-what) are easy to teach and relatively relevant for entrepreneurs. In addition, they consider that the right mind set, awareness, motivation, and attitudes are needed to create a business. This knowledge (know-why) is relatively easy to develop and is crucial for the success of the endeavour. Finally, "soft skills such as creativity, pro-activeness, leadership, risk-taking propensity, and wakefulness are decisive for successful entrepreneurial ventures" (p. 146). These skills, however, are very hard to develop or teach. This reasoning is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. The Educational Matrix**

Source: Haase and Lautenschlager (2011)

Regardless of this dilemma, the outcomes of entrepreneurship education seem to exist namely through their influence on entrepreneurship intentions (e.g. Raposo et al., 2008). The efficacy of entrepreneurship education has been widely studied among college students and to some extent among secondary school students (e.g. Burnett, 2008; Oosterbeek, Pragg, & Ijsselstein, 2010). Yet, few studies concern entrepreneurship teaching to young children (Paço & Palinhas, 2011). However, benefits from entrepreneurship education seem to occur mainly at the graduate level (Fenton & Barry, 2011). Also, there is evidence suggesting that U.S. students have greater entrepreneurial intentions, because of the country's more entrepreneurship-oriented culture, than students in Korea, where the impact of entrepreneurship education on students' entrepreneurial intentions is much greater than in the US (Lee, Chang, & Lim, 2005), therefore suggesting the greater importance of the cultural environment where the students grow up. Other researchers found that regardless of the positive outcomes of the entrepreneurship education, the diversity of educational experiences is a more important influence in future wealth creation (Dutta, Li, & Merenda, 2011). Also, in a review of recent literature measuring the impact of general education on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activity, Paço et al. (2011) have found robust positive evidence linking education and entrepreneurship.

### 3. TEACHING ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO CHILDREN

Empirical evidence suggests that the benefits from entrepreneurship education occur mainly during adulthood (e.g. Fenton and Barry, 2011) although the identification and assessment of potential entrepreneurs should happen during secondary education, when students are deciding upon their future careers (Rasheed, 2000).

Nonetheless, some scholars conclude that in order to instil and develop important personal entrepreneurial characteristics in children, these should be enrolled in entrepreneurship education programmes (Paço & Palinhas, 2011), as that early stimulus might inspire them to choose entrepreneurship as a career later in their lives (Kourilsky & Walstad, 1998).

Paço and Palinhas (2011) find legitimacy in studying entrepreneurship education during childhood, since there is empirical evidence suggesting that the need to take risks, which is an important entrepreneurial characteristic, is more frequent in children from preschool education than in secondary school students (Kourilsky, 1980). According to Rabbior (1990), children are born with entrepreneurial characteristics such as ambition, motivation, and willingness to take risk. However, this adventurous spirit declines as they grow. Löbler (2006) suggests that entrepreneurial attitudes and motivations can be enhanced in a very early stage of a person's life. Lee, Lim, Pathak, Chang, and Li (2006) state that children should be taught to make decisions and accept mistakes as part of the learning process, proposing that active experimentation should be balanced with abstract conceptualisation, thus enlarging children's propensity to become entrepreneurs. Lindström (2013) argues that entrepreneurial behaviour can be developed since young ages, namely curiosity, imagination, creativity, and ability to see possibilities, self-consciousness about own talents, motivation and initiative, leadership, and have-and-take responsibility. Entrepreneurship education should therefore be able to counterbalance the restraints children face growing up that weakens those skills (Rabbior, 1990). Consequently, entrepreneurship teaching should start very early in children's lives (Stevenson & Lundström, 2002) in order to increase the odds to be successful both as an intrapreneur or an entrepreneur (Carvalho, 2013).

Finally, Paço and Palinhas (2011) point out that entrepreneurship education must be a goal at primary and secondary schools, and not only at universities, encouraging students to acquire individual soft skills that contribute towards the development of an enterprising attitude.

#### 4. DEVELOPING ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS IN SMALL CHILDREN

The aim of this research is to study and improve the methodology that is being used to foster entrepreneurship skills in children and teenagers, from pre-schoolers to 12<sup>th</sup> graders, at an international private school located in Porto, Portugal.

The school's mission is to nurture and provide incentives for the development of their students, turning them into individuals who will meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century through versatile intellectual competence, a passion for discovery, increased social fairness, and uncompromising commitment. By providing a challenging, inclusive international education, the school intends that all its students:

- Will be *challenged* to fulfil their academic, artistic, athletic, and interpersonal potential by being committed to performing their personal best at all times.
- Will become *lifelong* learners through the acquisition of at least three languages, and competencies and skills to ensure they are focused, resilient, ambitious, curious, creative, and courageous, with a willingness to adapt to new situations.

- Will be *internationally* minded adults by being taught tolerance and respect for differences; are reflective, critical thinkers on environmental and global issues, and have a deep sense of awareness of other people, cultures, countries, and customs.
- Will be *principled* citizens of the world with strong values and a sense of self, enabling them to be ethical, compassionate, tolerant, open-minded, and just.

The research is very ambitious since it involves youngsters in very different age levels (from 3 to 18 years old). To develop an entrepreneurial culture, it is fundamental to foment an entrepreneurial spirit in children and teenagers, and that can only be achieved by adjusting the teaching, its aims and methodology, in accordance to each specific year group. “Teaching and learning to develop the entrepreneurial spirit involves transmitting and acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal characteristics that are suitable for the age and level of development of the youth students” (Paço & Palinhas, 2011, p. 595).

Therefore, in the first phase of this research, we attempt to understand how entrepreneurial skills are instilled in small children at this school. In this paper, the first results are presented. They respect the development of entrepreneurial skills in kids at *Pre-Kinder* (3 years old), *Kindergarten* (4 years old) and *Reception* (5 year olds) levels.

First, we have identified the entrepreneurship skills whose development is appropriate for those ages. The European Commission (2013, p. 6) points out that “young people who benefit from entrepreneurial learning develop business knowledge and essential skills and attitudes, including creativity, initiative, tenacity, teamwork, understanding of risk, and a sense of responsibility. This is the entrepreneurial mind-set that helps entrepreneurs transform ideas into action and also significantly increases employability”. Rabbior (1990) states that children are ambitious, motivated and willing to take risk. Lindström (2013) identifies curiosity, imagination, creativity, ability to see possibilities, consciousness about own talent, motivation to learn, initiative, leadership, and responsibility as entrepreneurial skills that can be developed by pre-schoolers. Paço and Palinhas (2011) analyse how an entrepreneurship teaching programme contributed to students, aged 6 to 8, developing enterprising characteristics such as creativity, willingness to take risks and withstanding failure, personal control, self-esteem, and confidence, as well as social behaviour such as tolerance, cooperation, and sharing.

Having in mind the age group in the analysis, in this research we have chosen to consider the following skills: independence and responsibility; self-esteem, confidence, and consciousness about own talent; creativity and ability to see possibilities; willingness to take risks, withstanding failure, and perseverance; and personal control. We have also considered the social skills of tolerance and ability to cooperate and share. Having identified those skills, we have analysed how their development is promoted by the school.

#### 4.1 Independence and Responsibility

At this school, children are encouraged to be as independent as possible and to be proud of their independence, since pre-kinder level (3 years old). They are encouraged to eat by themselves, to look for their personal belongings, to be responsible for simple tasks, like tidying up tables after each activity, and to take care of their personal hygiene, such as brushing their teeth after lunch and going to the toilette without assistance. Children are

also asked to change their own clothes before and after Physical Education and Swimming lessons. Teachers and assistants help less independent children in these tasks, always inciting them to develop these 'grown up skills'.

Although in the beginning of the school day, parents are allowed to accompany their children to the classroom door, the school has a 'kiss and go' policy that is expected to reinforce the kids' independence. The school asks parents to leave the kids at the school entrance and to let them walk on their own into the classroom. For safety reasons, school's staff is placed along the corridors to ensure that children actually get to the classrooms. The school says that even though many parents do not wish to observe this policy, the fact is that most children start asking their parents to stop taking them all the way into the classroom very soon after the beginning of the school year.

#### **4.2 Self-esteem, confidence, and consciousness about own talent**

To reinforce the sense of pride about their own personal achievements, the school uses a system of positive reinforcement. For well accomplished simple tasks, teachers reward students with stickers and tokens. For more important personal achievements, children are given written commendations. These achievements are totally personalised and reflect the effort each particular child did in overcoming their difficulties. A child might receive a commendation for buckling up their shoes for the first time, while another one receives it for finally knowing the days of the week.

Another simple way to boost children's self-esteem and confidence is by displaying drawings and other art or written work on the school walls. The young students' work is on display not only in their classroom walls but also in school corridors, thus promoting a sense of pride for the work done.

Further, several school activities involve public speeches or acting. Every week, on Fridays, there is an assembly of pupils in the same year group, where one of the classes has the opportunity to show their work to their peers and teachers. This work can be singing a song, reciting a poem, or performing a small play. Although most of these activities are internal, a few times parents are invited to assist in the children's performance.

Finally, children are taught that everyone is different and are encouraged to find their gifts. They are shown that some kids are good at math or language, while others are good at sports, some are good at drawing, while some others are good at acting. This aims to boost the children's self-esteem as they realise that although they might have difficulty in a curricular area, they are good at another one. To reinforce this, children are encouraged to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities to discover their talents and enhance their self-esteem. The school offers a diversity of those activities, including tennis, football, basketball, rope skipping, circus activities, handicrafts, music, violin, percussion, piano, ballet, structured play activities, mental arithmetic, chess, science, yoga, karate, Kung fu, among others.

#### **4.3 Creativity and ability to see possibilities**

Children are creative by nature. To develop an entrepreneurial spirit in kids, the main goal should be not to imprison that creativity but to let it grow. This is mainly achieved in Arts



lessons, where children can freely express their imagination and creativity, and discover new possibilities such as, for example, new applications for known materials.

The school acknowledges that to fully apprehend the human nature it is essential to understand the artistic expression as a manifestation of the human essence. Therefore, Arts and artistic expression play a fundamental role in the school's teaching principles. As such, the school yields several stage plays, music recitals, and other productions, and also promotes competitions, displays, and all sort of performances in school.

Creativity is also developed in Language and Information and Computer Technology lessons, where kids are encouraged to make up stories and explore the technological possibilities. Also, teaching is always accompanied by experiencing. As an example, children learn how sound is produced by experimenting with different instruments.

Finally, children are given plenty of time to play indoors and outdoors. In the classroom, they have a range of games and toys that promote not only roleplaying but also creativity, for example building blocks.

#### **4.4 Willingness to take risks, withstanding failure, and perseverance**

This skill is mainly worked in Sports and Physical Education lessons. This is a curricular area where children feel free to take risks. But mostly they learn to overcome the sometimes overwhelming sense of defeat. While playing their favourite sport, they learn that they can achieve better results only with hard work. They also learn that after losing a game, instead of giving up, it is important to prepare for the next.

The school offers a variety of sports and has a federated team of soccer and another one of basketball. These teams represent the school in tournaments and championships against other schools and sports clubs.

#### **4.5 Personal Control**

Discipline is fundamental, as it makes children feel safer and also makes them learn to control their impulses. In the beginning of the school year, children are taught the rules to obey in the class room and on the school premises. Their behaviour must comply with these rules. And the school is very strict in the implementation of those rules. A good example is punctuality.

Due to cultural but also traffic reasons, the Portuguese people are not very strict regarding punctuality. The school urges children to respect the time at which the first class in the morning takes place. And, sometimes, randomly, in order to press that need, the Head of the School is at the entrance door, so that latecomers have to pass by her.

#### **4.6 Tolerance**

Tolerance and acceptance are two main features of the school culture. Students come from 25 countries, and teachers and staff members have more than 12 different nationalities. Therefore, there is an enormous diversity of cultural backgrounds, although with a preponderance of Portuguese culture. Growing up in a multicultural environment helps

children become naturally tolerant towards differences, namely different races, cultures, and religions.

Nevertheless, the school promotes these characteristics through storytelling, video watching, and by involving children in activities related to important events and festivities from different countries, such as the Chinese New Year and the Diwali Festival, India's biggest and most important celebration of the year, along with Christmas and other Christian Celebrations.

#### 4.7 Cooperation and sharing

Children begin to work in pairs or in groups very early. Some school tasks are performed individually but some other are done in groups. Furthermore, kids are motivated to help each other in the performance of tasks or when someone is in need of assistance. For example, when a child falls in the playground during the break and has a bruise that needs to be disinfected by the school nurse, they will be escorted by another child to the medical office. This develops the spirit of cooperation and sharing among children, as well as independence.

### 5. CONCLUSION

The European Commission (2013), acknowledges that "would-be entrepreneurs in Europe find themselves in a tough environment: education does not offer the right foundation for an entrepreneurial career, difficult access to credits and markets, difficulty in transferring businesses, the fear of punitive sanctions in case of failure, and burdensome administrative procedures" (p. 4). The Annual Growth Survey 2013 has recently emphasised the need to improve the business environment to increase the competitiveness of EU economies. However, the European Commission (2013) also recognises that "not only is the environment challenging, but there is also a widespread culture that does not recognise or reward entrepreneurial endeavours enough, and does not celebrate successful entrepreneurs as role models who create jobs and income. To make entrepreneurship the growth engine of our economy, Europe needs a thorough, far-reaching cultural change" (p. 4).

Entrepreneurship education is fundamental to make that cultural transformation, and it should start as early as possible in order to develop in children the taught-to-teach soft skills related to the entrepreneurial know-how, like creativity and risk-taking willingness.

In this paper, we describe the soft skills needed to create an entrepreneur since kindergarten, as well as the methodologies used to improve them in an international school in Porto, Portugal. These are the first findings in a research project that intends to study and improve the methodology used to develop entrepreneurial skills in children and teenagers. The students of this school will be followed in time in order to know what kind of achievements they are reaching in their lives. Thus, this longitudinal study will be able to us to acknowledge the effectiveness of the teaching methodologies used at this school.

## RAZVOJ PODUZETNIČKIH VJEŠTINA KOD DJECE I TINEJDŽERA

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### SAŽETAK

*Poduzetništvo je obično povezano s ekonomskim rastom i razvojem. Postoji mnogo literature koja se odnosi na proces poduzetništva, urođenih i stečenih obilježja poduzetnika, te proces poučavanja poduzetništva, među ostalim temeljnim pitanjima. Međutim, literatura koja se odnosi na obrazovanje za poduzetništvo uglavnom je usmjerena na odrasle. Ipak, nekoliko studija pokazuju pozitivnu korelaciju na vjerojatnost da osoba postane poduzetnik ako postoji obiteljska pozadina, kao što je postojanje bliskih srodnika, primjerice roditelji i stričevi/tete koji jesu ili su bili poduzetnici. To bi moglo značiti da podražaji u djetinjstvu i adolescenciji mogu imati važan učinak na izgled pojedinca da postane poduzetnik. Dakle, poduzetničko obrazovanje za djecu i mlade može biti relevantno područje istraživanja. Ovaj rad ima za cilj analizirati kako se djecu i tinejdžere poučava poduzetništvu u međunarodnoj privatnoj školi u Portu, Portugal, koja u ovom području ima inovativan pristup.*

**Ključne riječi:** obrazovanje; djeca; tinejdžeri; poduzetništvo

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