

Entrepreneurship Education: Lessons Learned



Hoelscher Mark, Illinois State University, United States

Prior research indicates that ethnic minorities are on the rise in many places (e.g., Ndofor&Priem, 2011), women and minorities already make up a significant percentage of the entrepreneurial workforce (e.g., Mitchell, 2011), and entrepreneurship and new venture startups are critical to the survival and growth of our economies (Lindsey, 2011). We know that women and minority entrepreneurs confront more and different obstacles than other entrepreneurs face (e.g., Nelson, Maxfield, & Kolb, in press), and that gender differences are especially evident in entrepreneurial careers (e.g., Gupta, Turban, Wasti, & Sikdar, 2009). Researchers have suggested a systematic greater tendency towards entrepreneurship in men than women.

The aforementioned research raises several critical questions. Are these differences the result of gender roles and stereotypes? Will exposure to entrepreneurship education increase the propensity of women to become entrepreneurs? What are the differences and uniqueness among and between these different special populations of budding and actual entrepreneurs? Research indicates that entrepreneurship education and training are important in encouraging high levels of new venture startups (e.g., Chrisman, McMullen, Ring, & Holt, in press) but we ask if it needs to be specific and focused towards the needs of the specific targeted groups? Is there a specific type of entrepreneurial skill that needs to be targeted? Are those populations most in need of government support aware of its presence?

These five articles focus on many of these issues in an effort to shed light on these issues and better understand their mechanisms. The authors suggest that different types of entrepreneurial education might be needed

for different groups, based on institutional and contextual constraints. Skills specific training might be equally as important as formal education and perhaps more valuable under certain circumstances such as minorities and microcredit (Karlán & Valdivia, 2011). The type of skill specific training might also be heavily influenced by the specific needs of a particular gender or ethnicity of the potential or actual entrepreneur such as in the case of women entrepreneurs.

We also see the provocative suggestion that many of the women/minority group of entrepreneurs see little or no impact resulting from government policies and national strategies to improve on the women's motivation to startup business or engage in entrepreneurial activity. We can either surmise that government policies have no impact or perhaps, as one of these papers surmise, assume that this particular group of affected entrepreneurs simply is unaware of the help that these government programs offer. Obvious solutions differ quite dramatically depending on our interpretation. We either need to eliminate government intervention, helpful as its intentions might be, or we need to properly publicize it so that those most in need of the services might avail themselves of them.

In this research we also see some positive effects of more traditional entrepreneurship education. We see the suggestion that entrepreneurial intentions among girls are significantly enhanced through traditional entrepreneurial education programs. Prior to exposure to traditional entrepreneurship courses, girls showed significantly less entrepreneurial intention than boys. This research also shows that when studying nascent entrepreneurship among college students, male students perceived themselves to be significantly more capable than females to handle entrepreneurial activities in the control group, while the difference was not significant in the entrepreneurship education group. This suggests that entrepreneurship courses show promise in the area of increasing confidence among female nascent entrepreneurs.

We see that women entrepreneurs, in particular, face very unique difficulties. They have family responsibilities, different social and cultural values, largely resulting from a different social orientation of being a mother, caregiver, and embracing society's idea of being a woman. This is both a blessing and a curse in that women tend to be less endowed with formal business training, particularly in the area of upper management expertise. However, women also tend to be more focused on relationships

while seeing the business environment as an enacted environment (e.g., Hedberg, Nystrom, & Starbuck, 1976). They tend to gravitate more towards affective learning opportunities. They also tend to attach a deeper importance to social networks and as such work more diligently than men in their development in the form of networks and key contacts.

As noted above, we see that both women and minority entrepreneurs face unique problems in that they tend to have little business pre-ownership experience, lower education levels, and higher levels of unemployment. They also tend to be sole proprietors more often, all resulting in lower levels of both financial and human capital resources. Some of this can be helped through very specific training programs which are targeted at specific needs of this particular class of entrepreneurs. Thus, both properly focused training and aid from government are needed. However, if the government is to be effective, the involvement must be properly focused and communicated.

Finally, women and minority entrepreneurs lack the same access to resources (Gatewood, Brush, Carter, Greene, & Hart, 2009), including financial, that other entrepreneurs have. This research suggests that a focused approach to training, the development of networks, and direct access to capital (i.e., micro-finance) would help alleviate these issues and result in higher incidences of women and minority entrepreneurs as well as increase their long term survival rate (e.g., Gosenpud & Vanevenhoven, 2011). In conclusion, these six research papers suggest that entrepreneurship education remains important. Traditional programs help significantly in increasing entrepreneurial propensity, especially towards women. Women entrepreneurs have unique issues that must be addressed in order to fully take advantage of their entrepreneurial power. Those issues involve lower levels of human capital, confining cultural expectations, and stereotypes that hinder their progress. Minority entrepreneurs also face some daunting challenges, mostly in the area of access to resources. For both of these disadvantaged groups, focused training becomes particularly important. Within this research there is also evidence that as women and minorities slowly gain ground, momentum will propel them forward at an ever increasing pace. Evidence shows that motivation for business startup is also influenced by the history of the responsible entrepreneur. As women and minorities as a class become more successful there will be more instances of entrepreneurial role

models, angel investors and additional resources made available as a result of general entrepreneurial success. A rising tide does indeed float all boats!

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