

# Entrepreneurial Educators: A Narrative Study Examining Entrepreneurial Educators In Launching Innovative Practices For K-12 Schools

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to examine the entrepreneurial orientation reflected in the experiences of seasoned entrepreneurial educators as they reflect on the development of their innovative practices. The researcher used the Entrepreneurial Orientation of Lumpkin and Dess (1996) as a theoretical lens to accompany interpretive research perspective. An in-depth literature review revealed many differing definitions of entrepreneurship and few ideas on educational entrepreneurs. A qualitative approach was selected to gain data through the use of artifact collection and open-ended interviews. Data was analyzed using the three-dimension space approach model of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Individual participant profiles were created before a collective restory was made. Five participants who were purposefully selected as being educational entrepreneurs were used. Based on the data, six themes, and additional subthemes emerged. The findings partly agreed with Lumpkin and Dess's (1996) Entrepreneurial Orientation. The study found that educational entrepreneurs are: risk-takers, innovators, proactive, built on prior positive experiences, had difficulties starting, and were collaborative.*

**Keywords:** Educational Entrepreneurship; Entrepreneurial Educators; Educational Innovation

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to examine the entrepreneurial orientation or EO reflected in the experiences of seasoned entrepreneurial educators as they reflect on the development of their innovative practices. A few dimensions of EO include risk-taking and willingness to innovate and are factors that make entrepreneurship possible. The study focused on the experiences of five educational entrepreneurs who have had vast educational experience in areas that included naturalist education, performing arts, integrated arts, and the flipped classroom.

The United States educational practices are currently based on outdated educational ideals. Ken Robinson said, “The problem is that many of our established ways of doing things in... education, are rooted in old ways of thinking. They are facing backwards not forwards. As a result, many people and organizations are having a hard time coping...” (2011, p. 19). Although many attempts to solve various educational issues have been made, the need for improvement is present. Past reforms, such as No Child Left Behind, have often failed in making the promised changes (Zhao, 2012).

Learning in the United States has become a passive experience and lecture based, where the students do not need to apply the knowledge they have learned. Learning is often focused on the individual, not collaboration. “The culture of schooling in America celebrates and rewards individual achievement, while offering few meaningful opportunities for genuine collaboration” (Wagner, 2012, p. 172). If the United States continues to educate in its current, traditional way, it could find itself falling behind economically. Because it currently outsources most low-skill jobs to jobs to other countries, “current students needed to be able to compete in an intelligent, highly creative marketplace. ...a well prepared citizen of the future needs to be creative, entrepreneurial, and globally competent” (Zhao, 2012, p. 15). This section will provide a problem statement, research questions, theoretical framework, and an overview of the research.

### **Problem Statement**

The specific problem of practice was educational practices need to change in order to meet the needs of the twenty-first century and there was a lack of research into the experiences of outlying educational innovators who are trying new approaches.

Due to education currently being based on a traditional model that focuses on core, tested subjects, the researcher chose to examine experiences of educators who were doing things differently. These participants created innovative programs that focused on humanities and sciences, integrated the curriculum, and created educational models that better met the needs of twenty-first century students. “We need to gain access to these outliers so we can understand the organizational features, challenges, and dynamics that enable them to operate in new ways, so we can create knowledge that is useful to other organizations” (Mohrman & Lawler, 2012, p. 43).

### **Research Questions**

There were two questions that guided this research. In research question number two, the term portrait represents the collective dimensions of EO that educational entrepreneurs show. (1) How are entrepreneurial educators making sense of the development of their narrative as they launch innovative K-12 practices? (2) What is the portrait of entrepreneurial orientation of entrepreneurial educators who have launched Innovative Practices for K-12 schools?

### **Theoretical Framework**

A critical review of the literature from a broad interpretivist perspective revealed that the stories of educational innovations needed to emerge and that there was a shortage of qualitative research on educational entrepreneurs. Due to this, the researcher chose to conduct a narrative study to illustrate the participant experiences. The theoretical perspective used to capture participant stories from an educational entrepreneur perspective was three-fold. The overall view taken was an interpretivist worldview that took into account the educational entrepreneurs processes, practices, and activities. This view also took into account the innovative outliers in educational practices and challenged educational and entrepreneurial assumptions. The 3-D Space Model of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) was also used to form interpretations of participant experiences. Lastly, during this process the stories were examined through the theoretical lens of the EO, created by Lumpkin and Dess (1996).

### **Overview of Research**

The overview of this research contained an inductivist design where stories were interpreted through the collaboration with five accomplished educational entrepreneurs. To examine the stories of entrepreneurial educators launching innovative practices, the researcher chose a narrative approach, with open-ended interviews as the main form of data collection.

This approach allowed participants to share experiences and the researcher to further examine multiple experiences to shape their stories into one, through a collaborative effort of participants and researcher. The participants were vastly experienced, learned from past experiences and were each innovators in education. These participants were willing to share their stories and were purposefully selected by the researcher as being educational entrepreneurs. The research design was a five-step process that included: choosing narrative to conduct the research, finding the participants, collecting data, analyzing data, and collaborating with participants to form a restory.

The participant stories emerged through the artifacts and interviews and through an inductive analysis process. This process included the three-dimension space approach of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), which involved analyzing data for three elements, interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present and future) and situation (physical places or storyteller’s places). By analyzing the data in this way, the researcher was able to create a story that reflected the three-dimensional inquiry space that Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discussed “...a text that looks backwards and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experiences within place” (Creswell, 2007, pp. 184-185). This restorying also took into account the views of the researcher, as was common in narrative research.

Restorying was important because the researcher is an educator who wants to have an impact in education and prefers alternative approaches. Six main themes were found, although most contained subthemes as well. These themes and subthemes will be shared in the results. The study was significant because it linked the concept of EO from a traditional business to a new educational environment.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Due to the broadness of the idea of entrepreneurship, it had been a difficult term to define with some experts in the field branding it indefinable. Although this was the case, many experts' definitions are similar, and the author chose the World Economic Forum's definition to conduct his research. The forum described entrepreneurship as:

a process that results in creativity, innovation and growth. Innovative entrepreneurs come in all shapes and forms; its benefits are not limited to startups, innovative ventures, and new jobs. Entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action and is therefore a key competence for all, helping young people to be more creative and self-confident in whatever they undertake. (2009, p. 9)

Although ideas of entrepreneurship started in 1734, it is a relatively new field, only gaining popularity in the 1980's. Some of this research has led to differing views of the EO construct. The researcher chose the Lumpkin and Dess's (1996) EO construct with five dimensions, or factors that make entrepreneurship possible, to use as his theoretical framework. In some new entries, all five will be present, but not all five are needed for a new entry to form. "The key dimensions that characterize an EO include a propensity to act autonomously, a willingness to innovate and take risks, and a tendency to be aggressive toward competitors and proactive relative to marketplace opportunities" (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996, p. 137). Of these five, innovativeness may be the most important as it provided the link to education. The researcher hoped his study furthered the literature in terms of how entrepreneurship was relatable to education and what educational entrepreneurs experience when creating a new entry.

### **RESULTS**

The following six themes were identified as part of the coding process: *Educational entrepreneurs are risk takers; Educational entrepreneurs are innovative, Educational entrepreneurs are proactive; Educational entrepreneurs have difficulty starting programs; Educational entrepreneurs have had positive prior entrepreneurial experiences; and Educational entrepreneurs are collaborative.* These themes were further divided into subthemes. A definition of each theme and subthemes was provided in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Themes, subthemes, and definitions found after the process.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
1- Educational entrepreneurs are risk takers		Taking bold actions by venturing into the unknown (Rauch, 2009)
	Risk of reputation	A personal risk the participants were making as the success of their innovation affected their professional reputation
	Risk of wasted time	A personal risk participants took by putting forth an enormous amount of time toward their innovation
	Monetary risk to district	A risk that was taken by the school districts to start the schools or innovative programs, often in the millions of dollars
2- Educational entrepreneurs are innovative		A willingness to leave the existing norm and create something new (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996)
	Creativity	The process of having original ideas that have value (Robinson, 2011)
3- Educational entrepreneurs are proactive		Taking initiative by anticipating and pursuing new opportunities (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996)
	Right place, right time	Participants seeing an opportunity
4- Educational entrepreneurs have difficulty starting programs		Participants faced various challenges that needed to be overcome for their innovation to be successful
	Hard to meet expectations	Participants had difficulty meeting expectations of stakeholders who wanted instant success
	Too much to do	Participants were overwhelmed by the number of details needed to be addressed
5- Educational entrepreneurs have had positive prior entrepreneurial experiences		Participants created other successful entrepreneurial ventures in the education sector, prior to a larger one, or multiple ones; that was/were the focus of the study
	Smaller scale	Participants have created a previous successful educational innovation, but on a smaller, less risky scale
	Started with help	Participants had individuals or mentors that have guided them down the entrepreneurial path
6- Educational entrepreneurs are collaborative		Educational entrepreneurs enjoy and need to work with people
	Key members	People who the participants worked with, who were believed to be vital in the creation of the innovation
	Non-key members	People who the participants enjoyed working with and may have added to the overall success of the innovation, but did not have a key role

**CONCLUSION**

This qualitative narrative study examined the experiences of accomplished educational entrepreneurs. From hearing the stories of educational entrepreneurs, the researcher learned about the processes that educational entrepreneurs went through when creating an innovation, complete with their personal thoughts, feeling, reflections, and opinions. Stories differed by participants, but commonalities were found, and results formed. Participant stories were recorded, transcribed, and then coded based on the three-dimension space approach of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). From this data, themes and subthemes were formed. It was concluded that Educational entrepreneurs do not follow all the traits of a typical entrepreneur based on the EO model of Lumpkin and Dess (1996). They share the commonalities of being a risk-taker, being innovative, and being proactive. Educational entrepreneurs take different journeys to create successful ventures, but often build on past successes and endure a difficult start. It was also found that due to the collaborative nature of education; Educational Entrepreneurs need to work with others to be successful.

Although education is failing many students, success stories do exist. Rich, innovative, experiential learning is taking place, often due to the ideas of educational entrepreneurs. “Entrepreneurs, in a broad sense, are not only a select few. Everyone needs to be entrepreneurial in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Zhao, 2012, p. 8). For students to become entrepreneurs, education needs to focus on incorporating creativity and innovation. We need to transform, “the classroom experience at every level is essential to develop the capacities of young people to become innovators” (Wagner, 2012, p. 202). Hess provided a proper summation for the need for entrepreneurship in education.

...the greatest educational risk we confront today lies not in nurturing the nascent entrepreneurial sector but in continuing to cling to an inadequate and anachronistic status quo. Risk is the price of progress. Failed ideas, providers, and schools are indeed a high price to pay. They are only worth paying when compared to the alternative, to the stagnation and the ceaseless, pointless tinkering that have for so long been the face of school reform (2006, p. 260).

Solving today’s educational problems of stagnation and tinkering may be up to an educational entrepreneur.

#### **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

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**NOTES**