Danish University Colleges

She did it - I could do it too

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She did it - I could do it too

The title is a quote from a student on the social educational programme who participated in The Push Programme (PEP) run by VIA Student Incubator, Aarhus. During the programme, the student suddenly sees themselves as someone who can help to create and launch new initiatives within the social field. This realisation happens in the meeting with a social entrepreneur who has taken the same course as the student.

We included the quote because it illustrates what typically happens to the students’ identity on the PEP programme. It is valuable because the identity the students bring to the programme tends to be limited to the vision of working in existing practices in the future – not to being able to help create and realise new products, processes or services, which create new and better value in the social field. This is a real problem. Students need to have the opportunity to experiment with new professional identities within entrepreneurship. As it is today, this field is often innovated by entrepreneurs who do not have a professional background. And it is rather difficult to create innovation in the social field nowadays in general.

What is The Push Entrepreneur Programme?
PEP is a voluntary space for opportunity, which wedges into specific modules of the social educational programmes in VIA, where identifying challenges in the social field and creating ideas for how they can be solved are being worked on. PEP supports students to go one step further and carry out test trials on the value of the solutions in order to be able to realise them. The dotted line of the model shows the interaction between the educational programme and the Student Incubator.

PEP is managed by the Student Incubator, which is a laboratory for experiments. Here students are supported in carrying out continual test trials on their solutions and learning from the different iterations/loops, so they will be accepted and implemented in users’ everyday lives. This is done with a focus on the inner innovation process, YOURSELF, and the outer innovation process, YOUR PRODUCT-YOUR SOLUTION. The two circles of the model illustrate the two simultaneous and complementary processes.

Pedagogical foundation
We see entrepreneurship as a relational phenomenon that can arise in educational programmes if the learning environment allows it.

In terms of entrepreneurship theory, PEP is based on an understanding of entrepreneurship as a transaction between a person and their context: “Entrepreneurship involves the nexus of two phenomena: the presence of lucrative opportunities and the presence of enterprising individuals”
(Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), as well as on the students’ potential for succeeding with their projects being related to their ability to take action to bring themselves forward (Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011).

Regarding learning theory, we work from the assumption that learning is situated, motivated by meaning and occurs through experimental experiences (Dewey, 2016/2006; Lave & Wenger, 2003).

The untapped potential for entrepreneurship
The vision is to release the entrepreneurial potential of interested students in the social educational programmes that have committed to a solution and are curious to learn how it can be realised. Through the educational programmes, they acquire two forms of practice that are potential for entrepreneurship:

1) A form of practice at the faculty, usually theory-based teaching and group work. This is typically tested through problem-based presentations, where students can give ideas for how to solve the problems. The character of this form of practice is reflection-over-action (Schön, 1984).

2) A form of practice in the professional field, typically test trials with citizens, where the student’s practice is linked to continuous reflection-in-action (Schön, 1985). This is tested on an ongoing basis through practitioners’ feedback on the students’ test trials.

These two practices strengthen the students in becoming reflective practice theorists who can identify problems and formulate possible solutions, which is a potential for taking a step forward in learning how to realise solutions. But, all too often, this potential remains untapped – due to both the students’ academic identity and the culture of the educational programmes, which do not facilitate the realisation aspect.

The educational programmes are organised in modules of 6-12 weeks duration, and are characterised by a zero-error culture and formal tests, which are assessed on the basis of set professional standards. It accommodates limitations for experimenting, failing to learn from mistakes and for the pragmatic logic that underlies experimenting with entrepreneurship.

PEP is a new space for opportunity outside of the syllabus but affiliated with the curriculum, where students can acquire a third form of practice:

3) A practice form in the Student Incubator, which is linked to entrepreneurial test trials on the realisation of new solutions. This happens outside of formal assessment and without time limitations, as well as with a focus on both the student and the student’s solution/product. Having yourself in such massive focus is very different from what happens on the educational programme. The PEP programme both stimulates students to work their way into employment in the public system and to set up an association or a company that can bring new value into the social field.

Evaluation
Students have said that the business-related grasp of BMC has given a systematic approach to sharpen understanding of the real problems of citizens and the added value of the
solution. Their value concepts are linked to specific things that can be done – the concept of value is more abstract in the educational programme. Moreover, they are very concerned with “seeing themselves as a possible innovator”. In this process, the meeting with a role model, working with and on themselves and the way in which they typically approach a task is emphasised. Furthermore, presentations being a part of the solution development, especially the ability to express a clear WHY, is invaluable.

Students have also expressed how important it is that the teachers on the modules in the educational programmes know PEP and back-up their acquired skills – despite the teacher themselves not being a master of them. There is a challenge in the support of the PEP.

Workshop plan, activity and outcomes
The innovation model above will be used in the workshop as a facilitation tool and will bear the mark of the participants’ dialogue and hands-on work with their own teaching practice. There will be a particular focus on the inner innovation process around the student’s identity and self-understanding. Special attention will be paid to those students on the social educational programmes, but also to other students – because this is equally as relevant to many other educational fields.

The workshop will contain 3 activities:
1. Motivation (5 min)
2. Presentation of experiences from The Push Entrepreneur Programme (15 min)
3. The participants’ Hands On and relation to their own context (20 min)

The participants will work “Hands on” with following questions: How can we adjust students’ professional views so they think “I can also be an entrepreneur and innovate in the social field” about themselves to a greater extent? What is their motivational drive? How do we work with personal resources and potentials? What is the primary inspiration for developing our own practice that we can take with us from here?

The participants does not need to prepare anything in advance.

Litterature