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Entrepreneurial learning and school improvement - a Swedish perspective

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Background
Interest in education in entrepreneurship has increased in Sweden as well as in the rest of the European and the Western Countries (e.g. Erkkilä, 2000; Deuchar, 2006; Leffler, 2009; Jones & Iredale, 2010; Røe Ødegård, 2012; Pepin, 2012; Elo, 2015). Entrepreneurship as a concept and a phenomenon has thus become a concern for a lot of people working in the field of education in many schools all over the world. This means that teachers and principals as well as school politicians have to orientate themselves in this field and to communicate different interpretations and implementations (Skolverket, 2015). In a school context entrepreneurship is often used to describe a certain activity and depending of the aim it can either be viewed from a broad or a narrow perspective (Erkkilä, 2000; Leffler, 2009; Jones and Iredale, 2010). The broad perspective aims at developing students’ power of initiative, creativity, responsibility, self-confidence and ability to cooperate both within school and with actors outside school, while the narrow aims to prepare students to start and run businesses (OECD/CERI, 1989; European Commission, 2004; 2012; 2014). According to the European Commission (2004) these perspectives are interdependent because being allowed to develop one’s enterprise is regarded as a precondition for being able to work as a good entrepreneur. In the Swedish curricula (Skolverket, 2011a; 2011b) both these specialisations are visible: in primary [broad] and in secondary [broad and narrow]. However, as the concept of entrepreneurship is grounded in another context then education and has therefore mainly been connected to business there has been a lot of struggling among school people in understanding why and in what ways entrepreneurship can be useful in school (Sagar, 2013; Lindster Norberg, Leffler and From, 2015; Diehl, Lindgren and Leffler, 2015). For that reason The Swedish Agency for Education and other stakeholders are offering in-service education to help teachers and principals to implement entrepreneurship in school. One aim of introducing entrepreneurship in schools is thus to improve schools teaching and learning through entrepreneurship (Skolverket, 2015). This study is a part of a three-year-program on entrepreneurial learning conducted in Sweden between 2012 and 2015 and governed by a Swedish independent research institute, Ifous (Innovation, Research and Development in School). The overall aim of the program is to support the participating schools, secondary and upper secondary education, in entrepreneurial learning and to
monitor the effects through research. The program included education, support and research. Entrepreneurial learning in the improvement program is understood as a learning process where the point of departure is on students’ life world and interests and where students are challenged in their conceptions and thoughts and where cooperation with the surrounding community is an important part (Leffler & Falk-Lundqvist, 2013).

The purpose of this study is thus to investigate in what ways the schools participating in the Ifous school improvement program on Entrepreneurial learning have improved their work towards entrepreneurial learning. The research questions concern how and in what ways teachers’ learning have changed their working methods due to the program and in what ways principals’ learning have led to changed conditions for teachers to improve their teaching and learning. Key concepts are: teachers and principals learning, students’ life world, cooperation, teaching methods.

**Methodology**

This study involves teachers and principals, all participating in the Ifous school improvement program on Entrepreneurial learning. Teachers and principals from a total of 27 schools from different parts of Sweden have answered a questionnaire three times, one each year: year one 204 teachers and 24 principals, year two 186 teachers and 25 principals and year three 176 teachers and 25 principals. The focus in this study is on teachers and principals conceptions of entrepreneurial learning with regard to school improvement. The questionnaires were web-based, with one “open” question and the two groups (teachers and principals) had different questionnaires but several questions were designed to measure the same issue. For example there were questions concerning students’ possibilities to be involved in the content, planning, working methods, choosing textbooks, accounts and assessment. There were also questions about the overall view of teaching and learning, such as how often students were allowed to be active in the learning processes, in what ways they were working with issues that concerned them and had an effect on theirs learning and in what ways working life and local community played a part in students’ learning. Inspired of Blossing (2004) and Scherp and Scherp (2007) we have in our analyses used four components which highlights schools improvement opportunities:

- Teachers’ and principals’ knowledge, skills and attitudes to entrepreneurial learning
- Teachers’ and principals’ willingness to work together towards common improvement goal
- The coherence and the coordination of the program between the seminars
Resources, like time for pedagogic discussions, time for reading pedagogic literature, time to join the seminars

This means that we were interested in, if, and in what ways the teachers were open minded to the improvement program and if, and in what ways the principals run this work with a focused on shared goals.

Conclusions
The results show that understanding the aim of an improvement program and connecting that to the different understanding and knowledge of entrepreneurship in a school context are crucial issues (Scherp and Scherp, 2007). Teachers’ individual knowledge and experiences differs but according to the questionnaire the teachers’ awareness on their own development and teaching has increased. For example, the teachers claim that after they have started to listen more to their students and thus started to have dialogues instead of monologues, they have discovered that the students’ motivation have increased. This is in line with motivation research (Giota, 2006) and creativity research (Hoff, 2014), which is clear that participation and influence make students’ to feel more fulfilled in their school work. The teachers stress this as an important issue in the pedagogical discussions that are ongoing between colleagues. They mean that peer learning between colleagues has open up new thoughts and ideas about teaching and learning and has contributed to their own motivation to teaching and learning. During the seminars, the lectures and the experiences in the discussions between teachers, have also contributed to “changing thoughts” around issues like, how to make tasks and how to change the rhetoric in the dialogue to become more close to students life world. The principals emphasize the importance of sharing experiences with other school leaders for creating the conditions for the continuing work at home. They mean that the program has created openness to didactic and pedagogical discussions. According to the principals the challenges in this school improvement program is to hold, hold on and hold out and to realize that change takes time.

References


