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Experiential Learning and the Development of Entrepreneurial Competence

Abstract: The acquisition of entrepreneurial competence during compulsory education is not only the goal but also the pedagogical expectation and the expected outcome of modern education. Such an acquisition—in its complexity of formulation, definitions as well as skills and abilities—is a challenge for educational stakeholders. At the same time, the search for effective solutions, approaches and models for implementation in the educational process remains open and needs to be analysed and evaluated. This paper aims to analyse the benefits of learning through gaining experience with the aim of mastering entrepreneurship as one of the key competencies required for self-actualisation, lifelong development and achieving global competitiveness in the labour market. It describes, analyses and identifies elements of experiential learning as a prerequisite for the acquisition of entrepreneurial competence. The paper presents the results of research conducted on a specific educational model for entrepreneurship: The Centre for Entrepreneurial Excellence of Varaždin County (Croatia). From the analysis and interpretation of the obtained results, the findings show that the concepts of experiential learning and teaching at the Centre have been implemented through didactic-methodical work with students. Thus, these concepts are an effective approach for the development of entrepreneurship among students.

Keywords: experiential pedagogy, experiential learning and teaching, working methods, teaching strategies, entrepreneurial competence, models of education for entrepreneurship

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Introduction

The value of entrepreneurship in the development of society is recognised in everyday discourse, but the educational value of entrepreneurship has recently been questioned. Due to unanswered questions about the purpose, nature, impact and potential of entrepreneurship education, suspicion is often cast on its legitimacy. Moreover, due to the established understanding of entrepreneurship exclusively in the domestic business sector, entrepreneurship education is often marginalised, although it is implemented at the level of compulsory education in Croatia in the form of cross-curricular topics (Nacionalni okvirni kurikulum za predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje te opće obvezno i srednjoškolsko obrazovanje 2011, eng. National Curriculum Framework 2011). By looking at entrepreneurship from a pedagogical point of view, we move away from its economic meaning and put the human being — a competent individual, educated for life and striving for self-actualisation — in the foreground. In this context, we emphasise the great responsibility and role of the educational system, which must provide a young person with the opportunity to acquire basic competencies, one of which is entrepreneurial. This humanistic approach to entrepreneurship asserts that it is a socio-cultural and educational value that must be promoted and encouraged because through acquiring entrepreneurial competence, one can face social and economic changes and become an initiator of positive changes as well as a pillar of progress in society. Teaching entrepreneurship requires more than understanding and recognition; it requires application, practice, practicality and action. Experience is the key factor in acquiring entrepreneurial competence (Mason et al. 2013). Active and experiential learning, in which knowledge is built through the process of doing, are the qualities of an appropriate approach to entrepreneurial competence development, and the skills and abilities developed through experience and one's own participation ensure their better application in everyday life (Cohen et al. 2020). Experiential education as a pedagogical-didactic concept combines theoretical considerations and practical action as well as emphasises learning through work, direct involvement in activities and reflection on the significance of these actions for the student's behaviour, feelings and understanding. Involvement in

entrepreneurial experiences and participation in entrepreneurial activities directly affect the student's mastery of components of entrepreneurial competence, such as learning skills, working in teams, being creative and innovative, risk-taking and taking personal responsibility for success or failure (Bacigalupo et al. 2016).

After reviewing the relevant literature, our paper sets out the methodology by which a study of a specific form of intentional entrepreneurship education was conducted in 2020, namely the Centre for Entrepreneurial Excellence of Varaždin County (hereafter »the Centre«). The programs offered by the Centre focus on students in elementary and high school. The Centre offers three different programs based on the age of the students: »Mali kreativac« (Little Creator) for students from 5th to 8th grade of elementary school; »Financijska pismenost« (Financial Literacy) for students from 1st and 2nd grade of high school; and »Poduzetništvo budućnosti« (Entrepreneurship for the Future) for students from 3rd and 4th grade of high school. Attendance at the centre is free of charge and thus available to every student. Classes are held on weekends when students do not have their regular school duties, and the number of students is limited — between 10 and 20, depending on the program — to ensure the quality of mentoring work on practical tasks and the active participation of each student. The mentors of the Centre are teachers from the Varaždin School of Economics (Gospodarska škola Varaždin) as well as external employees, mainly from the business sector, who provide practical knowledge and skills to the students.

After describing the main results and analysing the data, we conclude by arguing the appropriateness of experiential learning and experiential education in the process of promoting and acquiring entrepreneurial competence. We then present the implications of our findings for pedagogical theory and practice and the need for further research on this phenomenon.

Theoretical Analysis (Literature Review)

Relevance and Determining Entrepreneurial Competence

If we look for more general definitions of entrepreneurship, we find that entrepreneurship is often described by the qualities and skills to be developed: »Entrepreneurship is the ability to initiate certain actions, to undertake activities to achieve the desired goal, [...] the willingness to fight against obstacles, the willingness for uncertain outcomes and risks« (Buble 2006, p. 1). One of the most important characteristics of an entrepreneurial person is creativity in thought and action. Entrepreneurship is the creative ability of a person to identify an opportunity independently or within the organisation in which they work and use it to create new value or economic success (Commission of the European Communities 2003). Opportunity seeking, value creation, ways of thinking, reasoning and acting are just some of the determinants of entrepreneurship that we need to highlight in this paper if we are to integrate entrepreneurship into the educational program

through experiential learning (Timmons and Spinelli 2003). In order to foster lifelong learning competencies in the European Union and ultimately increase the competitiveness of the workforce, eight key competencies have been identified. These eight competencies are considered necessary for each individual as the basis for successful personal and professional action (Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning). Initiative and entrepreneurship competences — which are jointly referred to as »entrepreneurial competences« after the 2018 amendment (Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning 2018) — are particularly noteworthy. *National Curriculum Framework of the Republic of Croatia* provides the following definition of initiative and entrepreneurship competence: »It refers to a person's ability to turn ideas into action and includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and lead projects to achieve goals. It is the basis for managing an individual's daily, professional, and social life. It is also the basis for acquiring specific knowledge and skills needed to engage in social and market activities.« (2011, p. 45).

In addition to the basic characteristics of entrepreneurial competence listed in the above definition, individuals should also possess communication and management skills, computer skills as well as be open and flexible (Caird 1990; Kuip and Verheul 2003). Skills such as teamwork, project management and supervision, negotiation, analysis and good judgement are also considered necessary characteristics of a good entrepreneur.

Experiential Pedagogy in the Teaching of Entrepreneurship

Effective methods for developing entrepreneurial competence have not yet been fully recognised and defined, so entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship development require intensive study (Zhang 2018). According to Kolb (1984), experiential learning represents the process by which knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences. The process itself occurs in four cyclical phases: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Béchard and Gregorie (2005) believe that the use of experiential learning settings is effective in the process of developing entrepreneurial competence because students change their cognitive structures and their ways of thinking and acting through the acquisition of experiences. The concept of experiential learning later underwent various modifications, and the synergy of theory and practice led to the creation of the pedagogical-didactic concept of experiential pedagogy, a concept in which the child is seen as a discoverer and the learning process as inseparable from nature and experience. Accordingly, the German educator Kurt Hahn (Vican 2018) criticises learning content that does not meet social and practical life needs but presents dry facts that suppress the child's urge to explore and curiosity. He believes that children need experience (an immediate perception of the learning content) and therefore reflection and application of what they have learned. An experience, understood as a stimulus, requires the

response of all human senses and therefore affects the voluntary, emotional and cognitive components of students. Numerous research studies have investigated the effects of experience on the development of entrepreneurial skills and abilities (Robson et al. 2013; Aarstad et al. 2016). The results confirm that gaining entrepreneurial experience during education contributes significantly to the strengthening of the components of entrepreneurial competence, which include the ability to plan, collaborate with others as well as develop organisational management skills and innovative and critical thinking skills. etc. Research (Prastawa et al. 2018; Pittaway et al. 2007) shows that traditional education has significant deficiencies when it comes to teaching entrepreneurship because the teacher is at the centre of the teaching process, and the student is only a passive recipient of large amounts of information. In such an environment, students often become disinterested and unmotivated, which ultimately leads to stifling creativity and innovation and increasing resistance to entrepreneurial activities (Prastawa et al. 2018, p. 327).

In order to develop entrepreneurial skills, problem-solving skills and the desire for self-actualisation among students, it is necessary to transform the learning process into a research process and enable students to learn through entrepreneurial action (Mason et al. 2013). Therefore, the process of acquiring entrepreneurial competence in compulsory education takes the form of simulating everyday challenges and problem situations and then placing the student at the centre of the teaching process. Experiential learning to develop entrepreneurship involves each student's subjective experience as well as interacting and collaborating with others to apply what is learned in practice, especially practical skills. In this way, learning has a direct impact on students' awareness, attitudes and emotions related to entrepreneurial action (Prastawa et al. 2018). In addition, prior lived experience increases the prospects for future entrepreneurial ventures (Fisher et al. 2008). Exposure to entrepreneurial activities (projects, experiments, internship companies, etc.) helps to develop positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship and positive entrepreneurial attitudes in individuals (Carcamo-Solis et al. 2017).

Education for Entrepreneurship: Approaches and Models

The classification of the entrepreneurship education model is based on the definition of entrepreneurship, which ranges from a narrow to a broad definition, and on the way it is implemented and included in the educational system. If we start from the implementation criteria, we can see three dominant ways in which entrepreneurship education is realised as an educational program: as a cross-curricular subject, as a separate compulsory subject or part of compulsory subjects, and as an elective subject or part of elective subjects. Regarding how entrepreneurship is interpreted, we refer to one of the earliest classifications by Jamieson (1984), which distinguishes between education *for* enterprise, education *about* enterprise and education *through* enterprise. The goals of the education for

enterprise programs and the education about enterprise are to learn how to start and run a business and to learn more about the business world. Jamieson's third category, education through enterprise, includes initiatives that aim to teach and develop life and entrepreneurial skills through projects and activities.

To some extent, each country has developed its own distinctive model. U. Hytti (2002) concludes that if we focus on representing the broader and narrower meaning given to entrepreneurship in the educational context, we can talk about three possible models: (1) entrepreneurship education with a strong emphasis on the business context (e.g. Norway and Austria); (2) entrepreneurship education in a broader perspective without including the business context (e.g. Finland); and (3) a mixed approach in entrepreneurship education (e.g. United Kingdom and Ireland). One possible approach in developing models could be the degree of inclusion of content and outcomes associated with the narrower meaning of entrepreneurship. Regardless of which approach we take, it is more important to consider the effectiveness of such educational programs. In his discussion of entrepreneurship programs, G. Rabbior (1990) provides an overview of the 25 most important effectiveness criteria. Rather than analysing each of these criteria individually, we have found that they relate to two important segments: the structural design of the program and the delivery process, with an emphasis on learning modes. When designing a program, educators should focus on learning objectives and expected outcomes, which are the fundamental determinants that guide design. Is the goal to produce future entrepreneurs, to raise awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship or to improve perceptions of one's own entrepreneurial spirit by enhancing self-esteem? (Rabbior 1990, p. 55). Regardless of the goal we want to achieve, it is important to understand and develop it. Another important assumption relates to the implementation method, to which Rabbior (1990) pays greater attention and which is also reflected in a greater scope of the proposed criteria. The entrepreneurship education program should be essentially based on the activity of the participants while using a wide range of teaching methods and strategies.

Research Methodology

Research Problem and Objective

Teaching entrepreneurial competence is a challenge but also a key requirement of the education system. Therefore, it is essential for education professionals who are committed to adapting the content of teaching to the real needs of society to find a satisfactory and appropriate approach to its development. Since traditional teaching cannot meet the requirements for the successful acquisition of entrepreneurial competencies, active learning (i.e. learning through practice and experience) must be pursued to shift the focus from learning about entrepreneurship to learning through entrepreneurship.

Such an approach to the development of entrepreneurial competence is recognised by the Centre for Entrepreneurial Excellence of Varaždin County, whose entrepreneurship program is intended for students of elementary and high schools. The present research project aimed to analyse the elements of experiential learning in the process of learning entrepreneurship in the Centre. In addition, the research objective was to examine the benchmarks of experiential learning and experiential pedagogy in the work of the Centre and to determine whether the strategies and working methods are based on the theoretical foundations of experiential learning.

Research Method and Instruments

To achieve the set goal, we used the case study research strategy (Woodside 2010; Yin 2018), which allows us to understand the phenomenon from different methodological perspectives. For data collection, we combined research methods: semi-structured interviews, for which the original interview protocol was created, and documentation analysis (i.e. analysing text materials and other primary sources obtained from the Centre). In conducting the research, we used a qualitative approach. We tried to get a direct perspective of the work with students through semi-structured interviews with the main persons responsible for teaching and entrepreneurial competence development. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was used in the preparation of the general research design and especially in the data analysis and processing part (Smith et al. 2009; Creswell 2013; Alase 2017). This type of interpretive framework focuses on the research participants as well as their self-expression and their personal experiences. In addition, the purpose of analysing the documentation was to gain insight into the planned and intended curricular foundations of the pedagogical work.

Research Process

At the time of the research, nine teachers participated in the activities of the Centre. However, the present research includes the three teachers who are most directly involved in the organisational and procedural activities of the Centre. In addition to the responsibility they have in planning and organising the Centre's work, they are also the teachers who have been working the longest and most directly with students in developing their entrepreneurial competence and are classified as relevant interlocutors in the interview process. The sample consists of teachers who teach business, public relations and entrepreneurship. The research was conducted in July 2020, and given the effect the pandemic had on teaching in educational institutions, all semi-structured interviews were done through Zoom and other interactive platforms. After interviewing the interviewees, the data obtained were coded, analysed and then interpreted using professional literature.

The interview itself was preceded by a detailed analysis of the Centre's ped-

agogical documentation (i.e. Centre for Entrepreneurial Excellence Work Plan and the Annual Performance Curriculum) in order to identify the main determinants of the curriculum and organisational aspects. The documentation mentioned above constitutes the basic documentation, so no additional criterion was applied for its selection. To ensure the quality of this qualitative research as well as its findings we applied the following concepts of Guba and Lincoln to define and examine quality in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, reliability, confirmability and authenticity (Lincoln et al. 2011). The results obtained meet all of the above criteria.

Research Results and Their Analysis

Teaching Approaches and Methods and Forms of Work

Teaching at the Centre of Entrepreneurial Excellence represents a significant step away from traditional teaching, where the teacher is at the centre of the teaching process, and students are in the position of listeners. Indeed, all interviewees refer to themselves as mentors rather than teachers, as the activity of the students — whom they guide as needed — is the main focus. According to the Work Plan, the lecturers in the Centre are a bridge between the entrepreneurial profession and the practical part, which involves real events in specific companies. The respondents believe that high-quality guidance for students, replacing traditional lectures, is crucial for the development of entrepreneurial competence. Respondents agreed that traditional teaching, which focuses on the teacher, is not suitable for developing entrepreneurial competence because it does not develop skills other than listening, whereas entrepreneurial competence requires learning through one's own work. This is also reflected in the vision of the Centre: it wants to be recognised as a place where students have great motivation and commitment to work. Instructors are persistent, enthusiastic and have great work energy.

Mentors focus on students' practical, independent work through project instruction, whereas a minimum of instruction is spent on theoretical content. Respondent No. 1 indicates that she uses problem assignments in her work; she asks students to assign tasks, organise work and do research, whereas Respondent No. 3 emphasises active learning because a student should experience in practice what they learn in theory. The respondents point out that students should be given the freedom to make mistakes because in this way, they can discover other (correct) solutions to the problem and realise that making a mistake will encourage them not to make it again. The experience of working on complex tasks that reflect real life and everyday situations is crucial for developing entrepreneurial skills. After offering several of their own solutions and ways to solve the problem, students discuss the problem together, advocate for their own ideas, defend their views and thus learn to reason and communicate with one another. Students should come to terms with the new information on their own, and they need good guidance to do

so. The mentors at the Centre are dedicated and creative and set the students well thought-out tasks to encourage their creativity and critical thinking.

Specifics of the Entrepreneurship Development Models and Contribution to the Development of Entrepreneurial Culture

Analysing the answers of the respondents, we find that they agree that the Centre is a unique model in Croatia that promotes awareness of the importance of entrepreneurial culture and the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills through concrete life situations and simulation of the needs of the labour market. Respondent No.1 emphasises the advantages of this model in terms of teaching entrepreneurial skills through interdisciplinary topics. The difference in this type of teaching lies mainly in the way knowledge is built. Indeed, through cross-curricular topics, the student »gets a small part of each school subject, which he then does not know how to apply in everyday life, because it is inserted into the teaching process without a practical basis,« (Respondent No.1) whereas the Centre primarily uses only real situations and challenges that young people can expect to encounter in their future education and careers. The development of skills and abilities that young people will need in their future lives is the goal of learning for and through entrepreneurship (Pepin 2012). Taking risks, generating ideas and expressing them freely, analysing nonverbal communication, presenting the product, public speaking, developing responsible money management, applying innovative and creative solutions and recognising risks in everyday life — these are just some of the learning outcomes identified in the Centre's Work Plan to be achieved through work-based and experiential learning. Well-defined learning objectives and performance criteria are essential if teachers are to provide high-quality education, thorough assessment. Performance criteria also help students by allowing them to recognise success (Glazzard et al. 2016), so we believe it is important to clearly define learning objectives.

Example of Experiential Learning and Experiential Pedagogy in the Centre's Work

According to the Centre's Work Plan, programs are designed to encourage participants to be creative and productive, to acquire new skills for realising progressive ideas and to create conditions for developing their own dispositions. The Centre's inclusion of all students — with an emphasis on the inclusion of students with special needs — ensures the principle of social inclusion and the promotion of equity. All the activities done with the students ultimately lead to a better formation of their creative and practical productivity and to a tendency towards entrepreneurship. Respondent No. 2 gives an example of an internship company where each student has their own responsibilities to simulate the work of a real company. Roles are determined at the beginning of the school year (secretary, accounting, marketing, sales, management, etc.), and students must work together, rely on

one another and perform individual tasks to successfully run the internship company with positive results. Students are initially assigned to the specific positions they chose after the openings are posted. They apply to this fictional competition by submitting an application and a CV. An interview is then held with the manager and mentor, after which employment contracts are signed. Students are placed in departments consisting of administration, sales and marketing, warehouse and accounting, but the emphasis is on acquiring organisational and good work management skills. In addition, communication skills are developed during frequent meetings wherein trainees discuss their previous activities and the progress they have made. They also improve their creativity and innovation skills by offering various solutions to problems that arise during the company's operations. Respondents agree that the Centre's most important feature as a model for fostering an entrepreneurial culture is practical work, such as writing resumes, presenting ideas, setting budgets, doing market research, designing marketing activities and launching products. Teaching is focused exclusively on students, and according to the respondents, this was the main guiding principle in the Centre's creation. Respondents point out that they consider the Centre's classes to be of high quality precisely because of the students' involvement, participation and activities. Teaching is of better quality when a student is engaged in thinking and working because it builds knowledge and develops skills and abilities. Moreover, the experiences gained at the Centre provide the foundation for addressing real-life situations. Research, problematising, processing new information, and seeking alternative solutions are the foundations for developing new skills and abilities and are also indicators of the learning process and of the quality of instruction (Glazzard et al. 2016).

Experience Gained So Far in the Practical Work

Given the Centre's emphasis on hands-on work for students and simulation of real-world business situations and problems, we were interested in learning more about the practical work students did as well as their mentor experiences. Respondents encourage teamwork, simulations and role playing to motivate students, engage them and expose them to real-world business situations. Respondent No. 1 points out that the students take the assignments seriously, as they participate in competitions with their training company every year and achieve good results. The students will be confronted with all these situations after completing their training, and in this way, they will be ready to meet these challenges. Teaching entrepreneurship is therefore a dynamic process that changes students' cognitive skills, beliefs and attitudes. This educational process includes several phases: (1) understanding entrepreneurship, (2) experiencing the entrepreneurial process and (3) learning entrepreneurship by recognising and taking advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities (Carcamo-Solís et al. 2017). For this reason, it is necessary to provide students with an experience through which they can learn practical knowledge. Respondents No. 2 and 3 agree that the Centre is a place that gives students new perspectives and shows them how to implement their ideas.

Discussion

Taking into account that experience is at the heart of the experiential learning approach — as it serves as a stimulus on the basis of which students retrieve existing knowledge, build new knowledge and thus prepare to face future similar situations — we note, based on the responses, that the main role of mentors at the Centre is to enable students to gain experience. We emphasise that this is not just theoretical knowledge but real knowledge about real-life situations, such as job interviews and resume writing. It is precisely the emphasis on students' practical work that we attribute to the experiential learning approach. When we consider the definitions of entrepreneurial competence, we realise that theoretical knowledge must be tested in practice through specific experiences; otherwise, theory becomes just speculation without any real-world relevance (Pepin 2012). Therefore, we need to take a step away from purely theoretical knowledge to knowledge that students can use with confidence in their education and future work.

Furthermore, emphasising the active role of students and placing them at the centre of the teaching process is also recognised as an element of experiential learning: »By putting students at the centre of learning, we ensure that students are the ones working-and thus learning-rather than teachers« (Glazzard et al. 2016, p. 86). Teachers have formally taken on the role of mentors. They call themselves mentors, they act as mentors, and they are available to students for advice and all their doubts and concerns. »Teaching by the research method requires teachers to have excellent leadership skills for individual groups and for the whole class. Materials alone are not enough to learn, explore, and acquire new, high-quality knowledge. The teacher must lead students to the outcome with precise instructions and proper questions« (Mišmaš 2020, p. 210). Asking the right questions is just one way to activate and implement cognitive thinking skills as well as stimulate student motivation and engagement (Glazzard et al. 2016).

Encouraging group work and peer learning is also one of the key determinants of the experiential learning approach. Running a practice firm — where all »employees« can work on both individually as a part of a larger team — is an opportunity for students not only to get used to working with others but also to develop a sense of their own responsibility for the overall progress of the community. Arguing for one's ideas in front of a mentor and other students helps a young person develop critical thinking skills, perseverance as well as creativity and imagination. In this, we recognise the indispensable components of experiential learning and contextualised instruction as follows: »making meaningful connections between learning content and the real world, activities that matter to the student, building self-regulated learning, developing critical and creative thinking, achieving high standards and performance in teaching and authentic assessment of performance through the student's presentation of his or her own work« (Purković et al. 2015, p. 139). These are the challenges that constitute an experience that promotes the construction of knowledge and learning on one's own. The Centre's pedagogical approach is a real example of teaching that shows us how theoretical knowledge can be easily acquired through practical activities and how entrepreneurial com-

petence can be taught in situations that students will face in the future. Practical application of theoretical knowledge plays a special role in students' lives, but we should not train young people for only routine tasks. We should make them aware that they can constantly adapt their learning to the needs of the environment (Stevanović 2000). Mistakes are also a kind of experience and an essential part of the concept of experiential pedagogy. They will certainly determine the behaviour and actions of individuals in the future, provided that they do not repeat them. The fact that learning outcomes are not evaluated through grades, but the learning process is closely observed, indicates that the learning process is more important than the final result (which is the assumption of this approach). Experiential learning is actually problem-based learning, and from the respondents' answers, it can be concluded that the Centre uses the elements of the experiential learning approach in promoting entrepreneurial culture and teaching entrepreneurship.

Teaching that focuses primarily on the student and what they do transfers responsibility from the teacher to the students, resulting in greater motivation and engagement among them. Today's students crave applicable and tangible knowledge, and according to the results of the research, the Centre is a place where students not only apply the knowledge they have acquired but also continuously expand their experience and become aware of future situations in which this knowledge and these skills must be applied. Encouraging creativity, developing communication skills, developing critical thinking, taking a stand, working as part of a team, taking responsibility for shared success or failure, taking initiative, persevering in work, researching and making important decisions — all of these traits significantly change the attitudes, skills and habits of individuals.

There is no question that we can see elements of experiential learning and experiential education in the Centre's work, but we wonder if such an approach can be applied in the mandatory educational programs of elementary and high schools, or is this method only applicable in the form of extracurricular and after-school programs? There are still only a small number of examples of experiential learning in the function of entrepreneurship development in practice, so it is necessary to take a step away from theory and focus on the implementation of entrepreneurship development to find an appropriate solution and effective approach to entrepreneurship education. It is necessary to define stimuli (i.e. experiences and problems presented to students) and match them with the specific challenges of real life, determine the needs of the labour market and teaching content, and most importantly, consider the direction of development of entrepreneurial competence components with a view to the future. The approach of teaching entrepreneurship as a cross-curricular topic in the Croatian education system does not exclude the experiential approach in teaching. On the contrary, the use of experiential learning in various school subjects with the aim of developing entrepreneurial competence and its components can enable the understanding of the complexity and broad applicability of knowledge, skills and abilities acquired through entrepreneurial education.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to show that experience is the key aspect for mastering the components of entrepreneurial competence. Learning implies an activity that requires minimal involvement of others; it is free and purposeful action by the individual in a goal-directed environment. And as we have shown, the importance of experiences and stimuli in building entrepreneurial skills is beyond question (Hagg et al. 2019). In this paper, we have highlighted the importance of experiential learning as an appropriate approach for developing entrepreneurial skills in children and youth at the compulsory school level but have also attempted to open a dialog within the education system, which has begun to recognise the importance and complexity of teaching entrepreneurial skills. Entrepreneurship education should be promoted as one of the priorities of modern education, and in experiential learning, we can see a model for successfully coping with problem situations in life because learning by doing and then applying that knowledge to everyday challenges becomes essential for successfully coping with the demands of modern society.

It is very important to recognise and appreciate good initiatives. Therefore, we believe that the Centre's future work should be continuously monitored and developed, which may lead to the broader applicability of similar forms of experiential learning for entrepreneurship development. It is also important to mention the issue of evaluating the Centre's work and determining its efficiency, which is difficult to assess due to the lack of measurement tools. It is obvious that due to these shortcomings, the Centre cannot be fully declared a model for entrepreneurship education in Croatia in which its approach is transferable to the whole educational system. We still do emphasise that the Centre's concept is studied with the aim of promoting the experiential approach in the development of entrepreneurial competence. Considering the different national practices related to the implementation of entrepreneurship education and the development of entrepreneurial competence, the research of teaching methods, especially by considering the position of experiential learning, is important regardless of the methodological limitations. Indeed, the present research is primarily aimed at understanding the determinants of experiential learning and teaching for the purpose of developing students' entrepreneurial competence. The case study method relies on multiple sources of data: interviewing respondents directly involved in student learning and analysing documents relevant to their work. For future research, it would be worthwhile to do mixed-method research design in order to analyse both qualitative and quantitative data. Recognising and defining the benefits of experiential learning and experiential education to develop entrepreneurship competency in more examples would greatly facilitate the creation of a unique, modern theory of entrepreneurship education. Therefore, more research is needed to expand the possibilities and potentials of entrepreneurship education through experiential learning. In addition, questions about the necessary competencies of mentoring teachers need to be answered. These competencies are necessary for teaching entrepreneurship through experiential learning. There is also a need for ongoing education and training and for creating a direct link between labour market needs

and educational content in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship skills. If our goal is to develop students' entrepreneurial culture, initiative and creativity, we must focus our attention on the learning process and actively address questions about the appropriateness of certain pedagogical approaches. Therefore, the field of entrepreneurship development is a fertile ground for many research questions and improvement of the existing system.

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IZKUSTVENO UČENJE IN RAZVOJ KOMPETENCE PODJETNOSTI

Povzetek: Pridobivanje podjetnostne kompetence med obveznim izobraževanjem ni le cilj, temveč tudi pričakovanje pedagoške stroke in pričakovani rezultat sodobnega izobraževanja. Njihovo pridobivanje je – zaradi kompleksnosti formulacij, opredelitev ter potrebnih spretnosti in sposobnosti – izziv za vse deležnike v vzgoji in izobraževanju. Hkrati zahteva nenehno iskanje učinkovitih rešitev, pristopov in modelov za njegovo uveljavljanje v izobraževalnem procesu, ki ga je treba sproti analizirati in ovrednotiti. Namen tega prispevka je analizirati prednosti učenja preko pridobivanja izkušenj za učenje podjetnosti kot ene od ključnih kompetenc, potrebnih za samouresničevanje, vseživljenjski razvoj in doseganje globalne konkurenčnosti na trgu dela. Opisuje, analizira in opredeljuje elemente izkustvenega učenja kot predpogoja za pridobivanje kompetence podjetnosti. Članek predstavlja rezultate raziskave o posebnem izobraževalnem modelu za podjetnost Centra za podjetniško odličnost Varaždinske županije (Hrvaška). Iz analize in interpretacije dobljenih rezultatov je razvidno, da se koncepti izkustvenega učenja in poučevanja v centru uresničujejo v različnih didaktičnih oblikah in metodah dela z dijaki. Zato ti koncepti predstavljajo učinkovit pristop k razvoju podjetnosti med dijaki.

Ključne besede: izkustvena pedagogika, izkustveno učenje in poučevanje, metode dela, strategije poučevanja, kompetenca podjetnosti, modeli podjetniškega izobraževanja

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