

Does entrepreneurship education make pupils happier about school?

The answer is yes. Entrepreneurship education not only enhances the pupils' entrepreneurial skills. It also strengthens their relations to classmates and teachers and encourages their desire to learn. This makes them happier about school.

Entrepreneurship teaching typically uses practical and student-focused teaching methods. This helps to provide pupils and students with entrepreneurial and enterprising skills. Other positive effects are that pupils become more motivated to learn and strengthen their relations to classmates and teachers. This makes them feel more connected to school. According to studies, pupils' connectedness to school is positively linked to their average marks and perseverance.

Perception of meaningfulness and motivation to learn

Researchers have examined which elements create motivation and make pupils perceive their education as meaningful. They have found that the teaching must contain five dimensions: it has to be (1) fun and (2) authentic, it must (3) take place through collaboration, (4) give students the possibility to take ownership of the design of their task, and (5) allow the possibility of bringing different kinds of talents into play. In order to be perceived as meaningful, all teaching must answer these two questions: What does this mean to me? What can I use this for?¹

The following three elements have also been identified as important for motivation:

1. Task significance: Is the result important to others? Does it create value for others?
2. Skill variety: Are several competences and skills used in order to perform the task?
3. Task identity: Is the pupil or student responsible for performing the task from A to Z?²

Effective entrepreneurship teaching typically includes the above elements, and it engages the pupils or students in a process in which they use their own experience, knowledge and interests as a starting point for creating value for others outside the teaching context. This implicates that the students get a high degree of ownership of their own projects and take responsibility for their own learning process.

English researchers have confirmed that the most important factor for strengthening school engagement is whether the pupils perceive their education as meaningful.³

A longitudinal study of 982 pupils in grade 10 showed that when the teaching focused on both business-oriented and enterprising skills, the pupils perceived their education as very meaningful.⁴

Increased academic performance

Three studies performed by Norwegian researchers have demonstrated that entrepreneurship education increases academic performance. One of them studied 1,400 pupils in grade 9 and 1,700 professional bachelor students and confirmed that entrepreneurship education has a positive effect on school satisfaction, study motivation and academic self-confidence.⁵

Results from another study, which focused on 14-15-old pupils, indicated that pupils who received entrepreneurship education on average also received higher marks.⁶

Moreover, in a study of pupils in special needs education it was proven that, on average, these pupils received higher marks after participating in entrepreneurship education.⁷

The role of teachers

In entrepreneurship education, the role of the teacher is somewhat different from the traditional teacher role. As entrepreneurship teaching typically involves bringing into play also other talents than the purely academic, the teacher has to reevaluate the students and their ability to succeed with the tasks. Moreover, as the teaching focuses more on the students' own projects than on the teacher's knowledge, the teacher's role changes from authority or expert to supportive coach or facilitator.

In a Danish study from 2014, Moberg demonstrates that pupils' connectedness to school increases especially when the teaching focuses on creativity and enterprising skills. The reason is that pupils taught in this manner perceive a high degree of teacher support.⁸

American researchers have studied how to organise schools in order to increase pupils' emotional connectedness to schoolmates, teachers and school. Their studies confirm that pupils become happier about school when they perceive their teachers and teaching environment as supportive and sympathetic.⁹

¹ Newmann, F. (1991). Student engagement in academic work: Expanding the perspective on secondary school effectiveness. In: Bliss, J. R. & Firestone, W. A. (Eds.) Rethinking effective schools: Research and practice, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 58-76.

Newmann et al. (1992). The significance and sources of student engagement. In: Newmann, F. (Ed.) Student engagement and achievement in American secondary schools. Teachers College Press, 11-39.

² Alleman, J. & Brophy, J.E. (1993). Teaching that lasts: College students' reports of learning activities experience in elementary school social studies. Social Science Record, 30(2), 36-48.

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³ Connell et al. 2000. Youth development in community settings: Challenges to our field and our approach. In: Ventures, P. P. (Ed.), Youth development: Issues, challenges, directions, Public/ Private Ventures, 281-300.

⁴ The Danish Foundation for Entrepreneurship (2015). Impact of Entrepreneurship Education 2014.

⁵ Johansen et al. (2008) Entreprenørskapsopplæring og elevenes læringsutbytte. Lillehammer: Eastern Norway Research Institute.

⁶ Johansen, V. & Schanke, T. (2014). Entrepreneurship projects and pupils' academic performance: A study of Norwegian secondary schools. European Educational Research Journal, 13 (2), 155-166

⁷ Somby, H.M. & Johansen, V. (2016) Entrepreneurship education; motivation and effort for pupils with special needs in Norwegian compulsory school. European Journal of Special Needs Education

⁸ Moberg, S.K. 2014. Two approaches to entrepreneurship education: The different effects of education for and through entrepreneurship at the lower secondary level. The International Journal of Management Education, 12 (3), 512-528.

⁹ Battistich et al. (1995). Schools as communities, poverty levels of student populations, and students' attitudes, motives, and performance: A multilevel analysis. American Educational Research Journal, 32, 627-658

