ENTERPRISE EDUCATION- WHO'S PARTICIPATING?

Mark Dawson
University of Southern Queensland

Abstract

As schools increasingly encourage enterprise education, a number of "stand alone" programs (eg: Young Achievement Australia (YAA), and the E(Enterprise)-Team) are being offered to students. Typically, such programs are developed by business-led groups and implemented at the school level. Many involve business sponsorship and often the number of students participating is limited. This paper investigates the characteristics of students involved in such programs, and the criteria for student inclusion. While this study does not examine the value of participation in enterprise education programs, it does include suggestions to increase student participation.

ENTERPRISE EDUCATION- WHO'S PARTICIPATING?

Enterprise Education is a term that is being used increasingly in schools. But, to what does it refer? In many cases the interpretation is particularly narrow and although teachers acknowledge its many positive attributes, all too often it is implemented in ways that limit the participation of the majority of students.

Enterprise Education (EE) is viewed by many teachers as an activity that is outside the curriculum and not included in day to day teaching. It is often seen as a "one off" activity that is only available to a select group of students.

This paper proposes that enterprise education is an approach to teaching that should be part of the curriculum and available to all students. By examining some definitions of enterprise education a better understanding of the true meaning can be gained. As well, information on participation rates in EE, and teachers views of it have been collected from a number of secondary schools.

What is Enterprise Education?

To better understand the place of Enterprise Education in schools it is important to examine the definitions. Too often, a narrow view of EE is associated with the negative connotations linked to entrepreneurialism. A broader view sees it as an approach to teaching that empowers students. In 1989 the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (quoted in Curriculum Corporation 1995, p.1) report entitled "Towards an enterprising culture- a challenge to education and training" distinguished between these two views:

♦ A 'narrow' definition of enterprise which sees it as business entrepreneurialism (in other words, the promotion and development of enterprise within education and training systems is viewed purely as an issue of curriculum development to enable young people to learn, usually experientially, about business start-up and management).

♦ A 'broad' definition of enterprise which regards it as a set of qualities and competencies that enable individuals, organisations, communities, societies and cultures to be flexible, creative and adaptable in the face of change ( 'This approach is based on the belief that enterprise involves using the imagination, being
Enterprise Education is not just about business start-up and management. It is a methodology that can be used in a wide range of contexts. It empowers students to be positive thinkers, problem solvers, and determine their own futures. The OECD (quoted in Curriculum Corporation 1995, p.2) defines the qualities of the individual that EE seeks to develop:

An enterprising individual has a positive, flexible and adaptive disposition toward change, seeing it as normal and as an opportunity rather than a problem. To see change in this way, an enterprising individual has a security borne of self confidence, and is at ease when dealing with insecurity, risks and the unknown. An enterprising individual has the capacity to initiate creative ideas and develop them through into action in a determined manner. An enterprising individual is able, even anxious to take responsibility and is an effective communicator, negotiator, influencer, planner and organiser. An enterprising individual is active, confident, purposeful, not passive, uncertain and dependant.

Few would argue that it is not the role of schools to encourage and facilitate the growth of such characteristics in students. To realise these outcomes may require a different approach to teaching. Sweet(1996, p.24)) points out that the process involved in enterprise education have many of the same characteristics as effective workplace learning.

♦ It gives students significant ownership and control over their own learning;
♦ It has a substantial experiential component;
♦ Much of it is cooperative, involving teams and projects, rather than being individual and isolated;
♦ It allows the learner to reflect upon the outcomes of learning, often in conjunction with other learners;
♦ It is frequently built around partnerships between educational institutions and other community organisations.

These processes will require many teachers to adopt a fresh approach if they are to be successful in implementing EE. Teachers will need to rethink their roles. The Curriculum Corporation (1995, p.6) states that “the approach requires not so much teaching in the traditional didactic sense, but rather the teacher acting as an enabler, a facilitator, a supporter and nurturer of student learning. And it means giving away some power in order to redirect it to the students.

The processes outlined by Sweet(1996) are an approach to teaching that is vital if educators are to produce the enterprising individual described above. As more teachers understand the broad definition, and accept EE as an approach to teaching, a wider range of students are likely to benefit.

The Enterprise Education Programs included in this Study

There are a number of other EE programs that operate in schools. However, in this investigation, three programs are described; these represent almost all the EE activities occurring in the schools approached.

E-Team
The E-Team is a program sponsored by the Australian Quality Council in which a team of 5 students from a school (usually year 11 or 12 students) is sponsored, on-site by a business for a period of one week. During their period in business, students work as a team to address real-life business problems. Students, with assistance from on-site mentors propose a solution to identified problems. In conclusion, students work as a team in presenting possible scenarios for improvement.

Young Achievement Australia (YAA)
Students work as teams to develop and market a product or service. This program is coordinated by YAA and sponsored by a local business/organisation that mentors students during the process.

Workout
Workout is a program that encourages students to develop creative business ideas, focusing on opportunities for youth employment. Under the guidance of local business mentors, students work in teams, to develop detailed business plans outlining financial viability and employment opportunities for youth. This program is organised by an Area Consultative Committee and supported by local businesses.

Method

The research study involved 11 secondary schools in and around a major regional centre. Participating schools were from both government and non-government sectors and included 7 co-ed government schools, 2 girls catholic schools, 1 co-ed catholic school and 1 boys catholic school. A further three schools were approached, however all 3 indicated that they were not involved in enterprise education. Data from these three schools are not included.

All schools had recently (in the past 18 months) participated in an externally sponsored EE program (E-team, YAA, or Workout). Teachers responsible for coordinating such programs in each school were contacted and using a telephone interview technique were asked a series of questions relating to participation, selection procedures and benefits of EE.

Findings

The table below summarises the participation patterns across the schools involved. Not included in this table are three schools that did not participate in any of the EE activities being investigated.

Table 1 Participation Patterns in Enterprise Education Programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Year group participating</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Number in year group.</th>
<th>% participation.</th>
<th>Ratio Male:Female.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>1:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>2:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>1:0 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11 &amp; 12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>0:1 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0:1 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All male school
** All female school

The results clearly demonstrate the low level of participation of students in such programs. With the highest result being 13.7% and the average 5.9% the level of participation has proved to be very low, especially considering that the three schools which did not participate, were not included.

There was a higher female participation in the programs than male participation. Although the apparent gender inequity is not the focus of this investigation, a clue to the reason may lie in the process whereby students are selected for inclusion in such programs. When responding to the question "What is the basis for student selection in enterprise education programs?", the methods of selection varied, however most teachers
described those selected as more able academic students, highly motivated and good communicators. Teachers in only two schools indicated that less academic students were selected in such programs. One respondent stated that teachers selected students on the basis of academic achievement. Another respondent in a school which saw EE as an opportunity to give experience to potential school leaders, indicated that selection was based on leadership potential. Most schools invited students to apply in writing addressing specific criteria.

When asked if they believed the students benefited from participation, the response by teachers was an enthusiastic and unanimous YES. Teachers were then asked to detail in what ways they believed students benefited. As teachers espoused the benefits, they consistently referred to the processes involved. A list of typical teacher responses outlines the benefits to students:

- The team approach allows students to develop skills related to working together.
- EE allows students to experience real-life learning and develop authentic understanding of problems.
- The collegial nature of the work allows students to develop a greater understanding and acceptance of each other.
- Students take ownership of the problem and accept responsibility.
- Students get a great deal of satisfaction from solving a real-life problem.
- Students became more confident and motivated.
- The teamwork approach favours creativity.

This list demonstrates the importance that teachers place on learning processes and developing personal qualities. One teacher suggested that that EE was different to normal classroom teaching, which in most cases remains largely content focussed, individual and teacher directed. This view was shared by most teachers, who believed the teamwork approach was rarely used effectively in secondary schools.

All teachers interviewed believed that there was a problem with low participation rates in EE and that all students would benefit through involvement in EE activities. In 10 of the 11 schools studied, EE was not part of the curriculum and was seen as an extra-curricular activity that was particularly time consuming for teachers and students. In many cases students and teachers missed classes for several days to be involved in EE activities. One teacher pointed out that EE was not part of the curriculum and was an extra burden for teachers and students, who, in their senior years are already committed to a very demanding work schedule. Several teachers commented that EE should be part of the curriculum and consequently available to all students.

Although it would be unwise to extrapolate these findings to other schools, it is probably safe to conclude that EE in many schools is offered in ways that limit participation.

Discussion

Findings of this study reveal:

- Participation rates in EE activities in schools are very low.
- Those participating in EE are generally academic students who are well organised and motivated.
- Teachers are highly supportive of EE and see the benefits to students lying in the learning processes used in this approach.
- The perception by teachers that EE activities are extra-curricular is a factor that limits the number of students who participate in EE.
- Teachers rarely use EE approaches to learning in the classroom.

Low participation rates in EE activities are a consequence of the activities included in this study. The E-team, YAA, and Workout activities all involve organisation by an external body. Only limited places are available and schools are invited to participate. There is simply not enough places for all students. Each of these activities is extremely worthwhile and this study is in no way critical of the activities or the organising bodies. As most schools indicated that they did not participate in other EE activities the focus of this study is to investigate who is involved and on what basis they are selected for inclusion in the programs offered. In addition, some suggestions for making EE activities accessible to the full range of students are included.
The process of selection clearly favoured the more academic students. Only two schools indicated that less academic students were involved. Although some schools selected students based on academic achievement, the majority required students to apply in writing addressing selected criteria. This approach theoretically allowed all students to apply, but in practice it clearly favoured the more academic, motivated students. Some might argue that because places are limited, the more motivated and academic students should be the first considered. Nonetheless, the study highlights the fact that enterprise education is limited to a select group of students.

By examining the benefits of EE as stated by the participating teachers, it is evident that the problem-centred, team-based approach to learning is seen as the most beneficial aspect of EE. Teachers cite increased motivation, creativity and accepting responsibility as positive outcomes. It is further believed that the collegial nature of such activities also results in greater understanding and acceptance of team mates. The team-based approach to learning that is used in EE incorporates many of the Mayer key competencies including teamwork, planning and organising, collecting analysing and organising information, planning and organising activities and problem solving (Mayer, 1992). Mayer recommends incorporating team building and problem solving approaches into everyday teaching.

Joyce and Weil (1996) refer to this approach as cooperative learning and advocate its use in all educational settings. The qualities that characterise this type of learning bear a striking resemblance to the student benefits of EE as listed by participating teachers in this study. According to Joyce and Weil (1996, pp.67,68) characteristics of cooperative learning communities are:

- The synergy generated in cooperative settings generates more motivation than do individualistic, competitive environments.
- Members of cooperative groups learn from one another.
- Interacting with one another produces cognitive as well as social complexity, creating more intellectual activity that increases learning when contrasted with solitary study.
- Cooperation increases positive feelings toward one another.
- Cooperation increases self esteem.

Inquiry-based cooperative learning calls upon students to identify and formulate the problems and pursue their solution. Inquiry calls for first-hand activity in a real situation and ongoing experience that continually generates new data. The students must thus be conscious of method so that they may collect data, associate and classify ideas recalling past experience, formulate and test hypotheses, study consequences, and modify plans (Joyce & Weil, 1996).

The approaches to EE described in this study are examples of inquiry-based cooperative learning, a model that is applicable in a wide range of educational settings. Unfortunately many of the teachers interviewed in this study acknowledged that such approaches were not commonly used in schools. Evidence from this study suggests that teachers associate cooperative learning with enterprise education activities. Almost all teachers viewed EE activities as “extra-curricular”. While EE is perceived as an activity external to the curriculum, teaching will probably remain largely didactic, content focussed, and individually orientated, and only small groups of primarily academic-orientated students will benefit from the cooperative learning activities associated with EE.

Suggestions.

Greater innovation and creativity in the teaching profession might well be achieved through the incorporation of enterprising activities into the curriculum. Such an approach would also utilise inquiry-based cooperative learning methods as part of teachers’ practice.

Cooperative learning that involves problem solving of real-world problems is likely to be a powerful motivator of students. Where appropriate, expert help from external agencies can be used as part of the learning community. Such an approach might remedy the existing inequitable participation patterns in EE. An added bonus of incorporating these activities into the curriculum would be to legitimise them in the eyes of the student, particularly if students can gain recognition for these activities.
Enterprise education is about empowering students to be creative problem solvers capable of shaping their own futures. It encourages students to work together, be innovative, communicate and take responsibility. All students deserve the opportunity to develop these skills.

The enthusiastic support for EE from all participating teachers indicates a willingness to embrace it, however in most cases there remains a reliance on external sources (E-team, YAA, Workout) to initiate and operate these programs. This should not be surprising as most teachers have had little to do with business, or how it operates. This however should not limit the opportunities, as teachers should be encouraged to utilise expertise from outside the school. Most teachers however are not experienced at working with the community, or the processes involved in EE. Professional development to enhance these skills will allow teachers to develop the confidence to incorporate EE into their repertoire of teaching practices.

To involve the full range of students, EE needs to be initiated and facilitated by teachers. This is a new role for teachers and if educational authorities are to encourage teachers to become enterprising there is a clear need to encourage and assist teachers to adopt a more enterprising approach. Teachers need professional development in:

- Understanding the broad definition of enterprise.
- Developing an enterprising approach to teaching and learning.
- Working with the community.
- Facilitating cooperative learning.
- Curriculum innovation.

When teachers have a greater understanding of the meaning and intent of EE, and confidence in their ability to initiate and facilitate EE, such programs will become available to a wider range of students, not just the fortunate few. The benefits to students and teachers are immediate, however the benefits to the nation are longer term. EE in schools is an important part of developing a "positive enterprising culture" which Karpin (1995) nominated as the biggest challenge faced by this nation.

References


