E² pedagogy: a call to re-center *Being* at the heart of the learning experience

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1. Introduction

Present worldwide, work-integrated learning (WIL) is at the front line in conversations about student development in real-work contexts (Jackson, 2015). More recently, the entrepreneurial experience has entered these conversations as the scope of entrepreneurship education (EE) widens (Katz, 2008). At the junction of WIL and EE, rests a reflective *passage obligé* on pedagogy. The *Espace expérientiel* (E²) is proposed and an interactive pedagogy conducive to all experiential learning experiences. Here, we ask: what changed in the teachers' way and perspective of teaching after experiencing the E² pedagogy? A summary of theoretical concepts presentation, methodology, results and discussion is presented.

2. Theoretical concepts

Work-integrated learning (WIL) and the entrepreneurial experience lead to entrepreneurship education (EE) research, before the *Espace experientiel* (E²) pedagogy is presented.

2.1. WIL and the entrepreneurial experience

WIL is a collaborative effort by industry and higher education institutions to formally integrate workplace and practice-based learning experiences for students in contexts such as: co-operative education, internships, work and field placements, service learning, applied research projects, etc. (CEWIL, 2020). It has been referred to as a "flexible creature which can be adapted to different disciplines and organizational contexts" (Jackson, 2013, p.100).

WIL is rooted in the plea of educational theorists such as Dewey (1938), Kolb (1984), Schön (1987) and Mezirow (1998), for less separation between classroom and real-world environments and making students co-constructors of the meaning and transferability of their learning experience through critical reflection (McRae & Johnston, 2016). To that effect, "WIL

is a pedagogical practice whereby students come to learn from the integration of experiences in educational and workplace settings" (Stirling *et al.,* 2016, p.6).

Among the various adaptations of WIL, the entrepreneurial experience has been gaining attention. In Canada, for example, recent efforts were conducted by the Co-operative Education WIL (CEWIL) accreditation council in defining entrepreneurial co-operative education work terms. Other researchers propose an experiential entrepreneurship WIL model to see beyond the employer as the WIL industry partner and value student's entrepreneurial mindset development experiences (de Villiers Scheepers *et al.* 2018). Thus, entrepreneurship education is part of WIL conversations about student transformative development in real-work contexts.

2.2.   Entrepreneurship Education

Over the past two decades, entrepreneurship education (EE) has proliferated in several countries with the development of numerous courses and support programs (Fayolle *et al.,* 2016). Although the discipline of entrepreneurship is mature (Katz, 2008), its teaching, learning and research objectives as well as means to attain them remain diverse, cross-disciplinary and difficult to align among stakeholders' various interests (Kirby, 2004; Pittaway & Cope, 2007).

From initially serving the purpose of new venture creation, EE has broadened into developing students' imagination to ignite creativity and change (Kirby, 2004). In reaching a far wider scope than educating for starting a business, EE transcended the sole interest and actions of business schools (Küttim *et al.,* 2014; Riese, 2010). This expansion made EE a driving force in developing employability skills across disciplines and brought micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) and organizations to the forefront of graduates' employment opportunities (Pittaway *et al.,* 2007).

Now, if *what* to teach has ignited debate on objectives and outcomes, *how* to teach and what happens in classrooms needs to gain more attention (Béchard & Grégoire, 2005; Neck & Greene, 2011). In doing so, the *why* question of EE needs to be raised beforehand, seeking connectiveness with the *what* and the *how* questions (Kyrö, 2015). EE bares no exception to this considering the multiple stakeholders involved and their sometimes conflicting interests in the expected outcomes of EE.

As such, Kyrö (2015) centers the *why* of entrepreneurship teaching around the development of an empowered ability for human beings to be free, autonomous and act creatively in a complex and uncertain world (Fayolle *et al.,* 2016). The entrepreneurial experience offers a space for student's self-awareness of transformation of his/her personal identity through the learning

process (Cope, 2005). Students, teachers and all participants to the experience gravitate around this epicentre of self-awareness and transformative development and communicate through the means of pedagogy: the art, science, practice or method of teaching and learning.

Hence, at the crossroad of WIL and EE rests a reflective *passage obligé* on pedagogy. Raising awareness, engaging with others, reflecting on theory and practice, evaluating experiences and developing a sense of self becomes a shared responsibility between all participants, students included (de Villiers Scheepers *et al.,* 2018, Trede, 2012). Pedagogy is the passage for such experiences to take form and transform.

2.3. *Espace Expérientiel* (E²) – Experiential Space (E²)

In the backdrop of WIL and EE, lies a common centre: human beings and their quest for self-determination and self-transformation. It is at this junction that *l'Espace expérientiel* (E²) pedagogy came to life. Initially developed in the context of EE for an undergraduate university management school program, it has since integrated various academic degree levels and disciplines such as quantum physics, music, engineering, law, education and communication (Bédard, Bibeau, Pilon et Turgeon*,* 2020). While several training tools or methods have mainly focused on skills mastery through the transmission of knowledge, E² places at its heart: Being, around which Inter-acting, Reflecting and Emerging Knowledge, graft themselves so as to focus on the individual, his/her subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

Figure 1: Espace experientiel (E²)

Espace Expérientiel (E²)

PARTICIPANTS

Inter-Acting

Being

Emerging Knowledge

Reflecting

Bibeau & Bédard (2020)
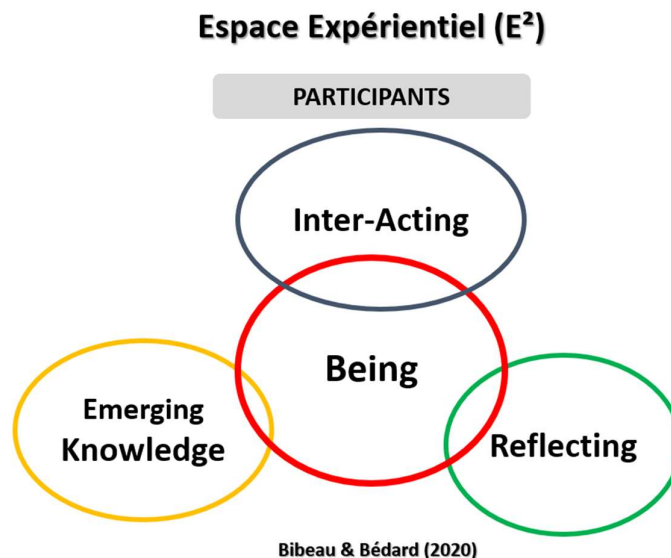
As an education theory, it presents "the foundation upon which the teacher builds a practice and organizes the dynamics of a system" (Bertrand, 2003, p. 18). As pedagogy, it is distinctive by the focus it places on the individual. In this *Interaction*-led learning space, pedagogy becomes dialogue (Freire, 2006), and transformative critical *Reflection* through participation (Dewey, 1938; Shor, 1996), leading to the emergence of an active development of collective *Knowledge* (Dewey, 2018; Shor, 2012). As this collective knowledge is co-constructed, it is both located and accessible to all participants in the learning space. Finally, at the heart of these interplays, stands *Being*, a constant reminder of why such spaces are created. (Bédard *et al.,* 2020).

"Accomplishing a project, resolving a problem, understanding a case study and transmitting related knowledge are thus relegated to a secondary level in the action of teaching. Hence, the development of the individual, through interaction with his peers, becomes the center around which the methods are deployed and transformed." (Bédard *et al.,* 2020, p.5).

In this perspective, the teacher, like all participants, needs to question his/her place and role in the learning space. E² proposes an unsettling posture to those for whom demonstrating their mastery of knowledge and keeping control of content are fundamental. Therefore, in the E² mindset, continual change, growth and transformation are for students, teachers and all participating in the experiential learning space.

3. Research question

Our research question is: What changed in the teachers' way and perspective of teaching after experiencing the E² pedagogy?

4. Methodology

The presented results are taken from a focus group session held on April 12, 2019, where the conversation with four participants was audio-video taped. All experienced E² in the context of EE teaching to undergraduate students at the Université de Sherbrooke (UdeS), Canada. The teacher's profiles were: 1) lecturer and director of an entrepreneurship training school with seven years of teaching experience before using E² in ten group classes since 2015; 2) professor with six years of teaching experience before using E² in seven group classes since 2017; 3) lecturer and coach to entrepreneurs in a governmental agency who's first teaching experience with E² was in two group classes since 2017; 4) coach to entrepreneurs in the public sector for 30 years before using E², from 2017 onward, in the context of team coaching to more than 250 UdeS students in engineering, management, music, education and communication.

The three-hour focus group session was conducted by two professors from the department of pedagogy of the Faculty of Education of UdeS. In all, 10 questions were asked to ignite conversations among the participants. Data collected on questions more specific to their description of the E² teaching approach, challenges met, and transformational effect were retained for our research question.

5. Results

The results on what changed are in three groupings: 1) preparation and delivery of content, 2) posture and one's role, and 3) awareness of one's transformation.

1) On the preparation and delivery of content, two participants with prior teaching experience raised important changes. To that effect, a "Socrates question-based and leave-no-child-behind teaching approach" as one of them put it "has an immediate impact of before, during and after the classroom sessions." In that sense: "it's a co-construction with the students of what makes sense to them at that time", adds the other participant. Hence, teachers need to adjust the covered content on the spot, and it forces drawing new content canvases for every upcoming session.

For the participants with less experience in teaching at university level, the change was experienced along the way. One participant shared an experience where, at mid-semester, "a conversation was opened with the students on their lack of motivation and involvement." By creating a space of constant interactions and reflections between students and prioritizing their individual development, redesigning the course happened naturally as responsibility of improving the learning experience was shared by all participants. "I had never thought of students from a client-centered approach, but it made good sense", noted this participant.

2) All participants raised their change in posture and perceived role in teaching. "Making yourself vulnerable, naked, uncomfortable," "with no safety net," "putting oneself in danger, challenging our self-esteem," are expressions on the required changes. "We are not downloading knowledge, we are uploading from who the students are," said one participant. He further adds: "it requires a constant sensitivity, a relational permeability where the ego is not in action but rather an active withdrawal permitting this relational space." Another participant notes that, before using this approach, the students' evaluations was what mattered most. "This had been my motivation for seven years, getting a perfect mark. Only to experience this new way of approaching a classroom and to discover that I wasn't really teaching for them." Another one adds: "It's a discovery of oneself through these interactions with students."

3) Discovery of oneself lead discussions on the transformational effect of E². All participants acknowledged that this way of teaching can be tiring from being in the moment as "you must be *all* there, *all* the time," one says. Participants also noted being confronted to their deeper purpose of why they teach. One to say: "It gave sense to what I do (…), forced me to ask myself why I do this (…). I needed to create such a space. (…) It's a way of life (…) You must believe in the human potential." To that, another one adds: "it changed my way of communicating with students and at home with my children (…) the starting point is respecting the individual." Another participant goes on to say: "It's an experiential development for all (…) focusing teaching on practice and on people, more than theory itself."

6. Discussion

As learning spaces become more engaging for students, little is said about the required transformation and challenges faced by teachers (Robinson & Shumar, 2014). Active pedagogy, EE and WIL pave the way to new methods. Yet, at the core of the *hows* rests a deeper meaning for teaching and learning. E² is proposed to unearth this resting place. As an education theory it offers a foundation to build from. As pedagogy, it triggers changes in teachers' content selection, posture and becomes transformational on a human being level of all participants. Building self-confidence and identifying the deeper meaning for teachers should be in the same center of all student-centered approaches (Peltonen, 2015). The presented results stem from a specific context and specific teachers' profiles. All are not equal in front of the E² proposition. Yet, all are called upon to re-center *Being* at the heart of education. E² is conducive to any experiential learning environment as the quest for emancipation and transformation is directed at students, teachers, coaches, supervisors and any other participant in the learning space. All, present interesting contexts for future research.

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